



MANGO

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
SQUIRE JOHN MYTTON
OF HALSTON
1796-1834

Jean Holdsworth

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John Mytton of Halston 1796-1834

by
Jean Holdsworth

Mad Jack Mytton, one of the most eccentric of eccentric Englishmen, has attracted popular interest with a fascination compounded of humour, horror, sympathy, admiration, revulsion and pity since he first strode into the public's gaze early in the nineteenth century. Whether hunting furiously with his pack across the Shropshire countryside, jumping impossible fences on his noble horse Baronet; or celebrating the birth of his first son; or sending to London for dozens of pairs of skates for the pleasure of making his entire household divert him with its antics on the frozen lake; or gambling and drinking his flamboyant way to death among the underworld characters of Shrewsbury, London or Calais. A man of excess in whatever he did, he amazed even his contemporaries who are not renowned for their restraint.

This book does not deal only with Squire Mytton's life but gives an excellent picture of English country life at the turn of the eighteenth century and the impact of the tremendous social and economic changes which took place between 1780 and 1834 upon the squirarchy.

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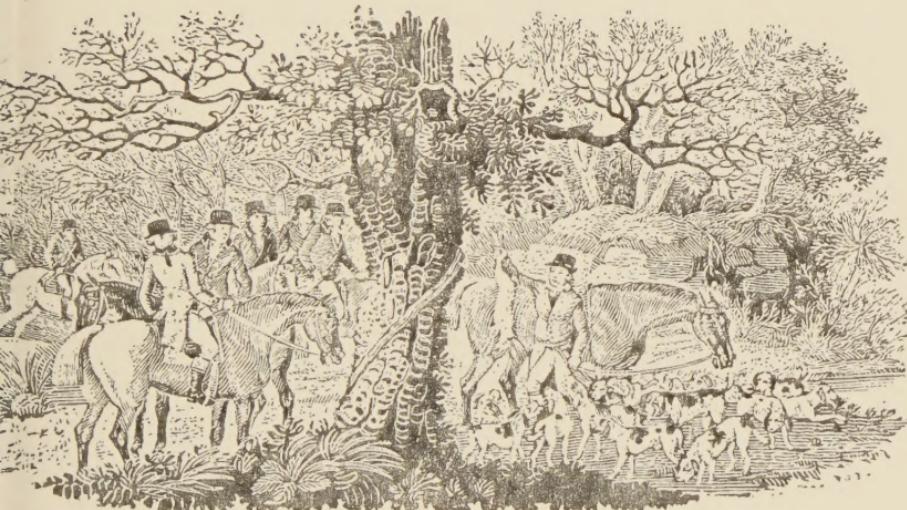
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*The Life and Times of
Squire John Mytton of Halston
1796-1834*

JEAN HOLDSWORTH



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DEDICATION



FOR

JOHN, LESLEY, AND JANE

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CHAPTER ONE



AT the beginning of the nineteenth century England was ruled, as she had been for generations, by the squires, the landed gentry, who were not necessarily noblemen.

Their great estates were family businesses, and one of the squire's most important duties was to marry and provide heirs in order that these possessions should not pass to strangers; the English gentleman's love of his land was a phenomenon which enabled him to maintain the harmony which existed between master and man, and the upkeep of a complicated class system.

The average Englishman of that time was not against wealth or its privileges, for with few exceptions the rich and powerful were taught from childhood to respect truth, honour and integrity, to pay their debts, keep their word, and succour the weak.

“Gentlemen are, or ought to be, the pride and glory of every civilisation,” wrote Thomas Bewick the Radical. “Without their countenance arts and sciences must languish, industry be paralysed, and barbarism rear its ugly head.”

And indeed the squires, until the Industrial Revolution, were the backbone of society, basking in the reflected glory of a handful of great families who traditionally held the choicest Court and State appointments, and drawing their strength from an order rooted in pastoral security. They were not hampered, as the French *petite noblesse* had been, by the necessity of neglecting their estates in order to remain constantly near the person of the Sovereign.

The Mytton family of Shropshire was a typical example of these robust country gentlefolk, tracing their pedigree back to the reign of Edward III, and owning considerable property in Wales and in their native county. They had lived since 1549 at Halston Hall between Ellesmere and Oswestry, where the Welsh border dips into England; the house had been altered and rebuilt over the years until in 1796 it was an elegant mansion set in a fine park famous for its oak trees, and "replete with every comfort and convenience for a country gentleman's establishment."

Squire Mytton lived well but quietly, with about forty servants and farm-workers on his payroll, a modest household in that extravagant age, but it meant a pleasant and carefree existence at a time when country life at its best was truly delightful. He ran a pack of hounds and kept a stableful of horses; he was friendly and well-liked in the neighbourhood and took the share of duties expected of a gentleman. Together with his friends he applauded Pitt when in April 1795 the Prime Minister reiterated his country's intention to stand firm against France, now conqueror of most of Northern Europe.

"It has pleased inscrutable Providence," said Pitt, "that this power of France should triumph over everything that has been opposed to it. But let us not therefore fall without making any effort to resist it. Let us not sink without measuring its strength."

It was not so much patriotism as family pride which bound these Englishmen together to keep out the invader, and in such dark times men looked to their heirs in joy or anxiety, praying that for them long life and a continued order should be the result of their country's defiance.

Squire Mytton's son was born on September 30th, 1796. Christened John after his father, he was a seven months' child, a distinction which he shared with Keats and Lord John Russell. He managed to survive this major hazard, thus qualifying as an eccentric from the first moments of his life, but he was to thrive and grow as strongly as any normal infant. Only later was it discovered that his hearing was defective, but by then his character had already been shaped by other circumstances.

Once the danger period was over, and young Master John howling for his pap as lustily as anyone could wish, the County came eagerly to offer its congratulations. Squire Mytton received them with heartfelt thankfulness, for the safe arrival of a man's heir was the most important event in his life and already he was making plans for the child's future education.

Gentlemen were expected to be expert horsemen, proficient shots, passable anglers, proud to learn country skills from those best qualified to teach them; there was not a corner of their estates which they might not know, nor any domestic event in which they were not interested. The Squire looked out over his domains, satisfied that his son would inherit good husbandry, loyal servants and a way of life dictated by centuries of settled order. What he could not see was that in this last decade of the eighteenth century the pattern of a vast social, political and economic change was being laid down. The dangerous ideas of the Revolution, the twenty years' conflict that followed and the new industrial machines were to alter, irrevocably, the old, comfortable, merrie England of the squires. Already the northern districts were thick with gaunt, cheerless manufactories against which were huddled the drab, miserable hovels of the workers; already the Enclosure Acts had pauperised many yeoman farmers and driven them from the land to seek employment in the towns at starvation wages.

The fine healthy baby in the Halston nursery was, however, fortunate enough to be born into a Golden Age of sport, for which the English have always nourished a peculiar veneration. Thanks to new and enlightened methods, hunting, coaching,

coursing and racing were enjoying a vogue which was to last more than a hundred years, while everywhere there was talk of horses. Small wonder, since he was the King of Beasts. Without him prolonged land travel was impossible; he carried the economy of the country on his back, he helped to win wars and topple governments, but his crown was slipping.

At the beginning of the century no one had travelled more swiftly than a horse could gallop, but in 1830 Fanny Kemble wrote, "When I closed my eyes, this sensation of flying was quite delightful and strange beyond description, yet, strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security and not the slightest fear."

The actress had just completed a journey, at thirty miles an hour, on The Northumbrian, George Stephenson's newest locomotive, and from then on man would intensify his quest for speed until it took him into the stratosphere.

But in the year of John's birth a man who could ride a blood horse to perfection, then put him between the shafts and make him step out like a "right goer" was respected as though he had been royalty, and many a queer little bow-legged jockey held his court among the saddles and bridles of the horse repositories, listened to by lords and tipped by baronets. All England stood and watched while the Hunt rode by, holding its breath for the gallant men who put their horses at the great leaps of the Shires and made the earth tremble with their going.

Squire Mytton was no exception to the established idea of what constituted a gentleman; he rode, hunted and shot, was cultured without being intellectual, and he realised that respect and continuity could only be obtained by example. He did not ask anyone to perform tasks he could not do himself, and, as in many other great houses, his wealth did not always mean luxury. The day began before dawn for both master and mistress, setting the pace of the whole establishment; sometimes enthusiasts like Coke of Norfolk would be out in field boots among their frosted turnips before the moon had set.

The Squire knew that land was wealth and saw to it that much of his incomes and rent-rolls was spent in improving

the amenities of the estates which would pay back with interest in the coming years. He did not care to invest his money in stocks which were liable to fluctuation, and indeed high finance and the City of London meant little to these men who lived their lives almost oblivious to world events.

The beautiful English manor houses set in their spacious parks were like small kingdoms, the people in them unaware of wars, revolutions, famines or floods for they had a myriad interests of their own choosing. Young John Mytton could look forward to a life of infinite variety, taught by his father to appreciate good husbandry and to be available to all his dependents for advice and justice. He would absorb the sights and sounds of the countryside around him; climb to a heron's nest and dive for an otter, tickle a trout and tool a four-in-hand, and the manly virtues of courage and fortitude would be instilled into him from the earliest age since these qualities were admired above all.

The English could display extraordinary emotions over trivialities, but it was considered cowardly not to bear pain or great sorrow with indifference. John himself, at the end of his short disastrous life, was to display such disdain for physical suffering that those around him believed him insane, but it was the ultimate expression of an attitude which he had cultivated since his youth when, spoiled and reckless, he had dared Providence to do her worst.

She loaded him with gifts at his birth and he repaid her with ingratitude, yet the blame for this could not wholly be apportioned to him.

His mother, Harriet Mytton, was a quiet, shy lady who adored her husband with an almost fanatical devotion which she later transferred to her son, and upon her must rest much of the responsibility for what happened to him. Seventeen months after his arrival she was again brought to bed, of a daughter, Rebecca; seven months later Squire Mytton was dead, leaving his small son owner of all the estates and properties, and heir to an income of twenty thousand pounds a year which he would receive when he attained his majority. Meanwhile the children were made Wards

of Chancery and John was doled out with four hundred pounds a year.

The loss of his father was a blow from which he never really recovered, young though he was. He was imperious and unruly, and Mrs Mytton was quite incapable of bringing him up on her own. He needed a man to govern him, and beat him occasionally; it was useless to rear him in a woman's world surrounded by nursemaids, baby ribbons and his mother's doting indulgence.

She remained faithful to her husband's memory and never remarried. Had she done so her son's story might have been very different; instead she sold the pack of hounds and most of the horses, keeping only one carriage for her own use, and withdrew into Halston with her two children. John, instead of receiving the liberal and all-embracing education of a father determined to maintain the security of all those broad lands dependent on him, was allowed to run wild and unchecked. He had only to plead, only to let the tears come into his eyes and his mother was beside herself to please him.

He strutted about the stables and barnyards like a young game-cock; he could have anything he wanted, ponies, dogs, cats, fishing rods. He took them and learned about them, and the animals followed him as though they were bewitched and perhaps they were, for some people are born with a natural affinity with the beasts and can do anything they like with them. His attendants noted his aptitude and were amazed. The child had no fear at all, holding out his hand to the fiercest hound and the most intractable horse, while bulls, rams and boars held no terrors for him. Mrs Mytton sought to preserve her authority and tried to forbid his excursions to the farmyard, but he was easily able to evade the nurses who were supposed to keep track of him and after a while these half-hearted attempts to restrain him came to an end.

He grew sturdy and thick-chested, but not tall; his Welsh ancestry showed in this, and in his dark hair and complexion. He was forever climbing, running and jumping; active as a

monkey and strong as an ox he would often come home soaked to the skin and covered with mud from some escapade which caused the nursemaids to scold and Mrs Mytton to shake her head in gentle reproof.

But no one laid a finger on the young Squire and he accepted all that Fate held out to him with the gay insouciance of a Prince in an enchanted land. This habit became so ingrained in him that for the rest of his life he was quite unable to believe in any other form of existence. He was never crossed or thwarted in anything, and never experienced the rough and tumble of family life for Becky was too small and tender to act as foil to her tempestuous brother. We may be sure he turned Halston upside down even as a little boy, but lovingly, for he was not given to malice; his word was law in the kingdom within the estate boundaries, and no one questioned the rights of the Squire to instant obedience. He was surrounded by men and women who saw nothing unfair in their situation and no degradation in servitude; brought up to respect their masters they found real contentment and security in the bond that held this patchwork society together.

The loyalty these people extended to Mrs Mytton passed to her son in due course, and one of the most charming of John's characteristics was his ability to hold men's trust and liking even after his worst excesses. As a baby he delighted his nurses; as a boy his contemporaries, as a man nearly every woman he met.

"The gifts of nature," said Apperley, "were amply bestowed upon the late Mr Mytton." Only one thing was lacking, and that was the ability to control his farouche and bravo-like instincts. The man who later was to become as a father to him, and who perhaps got closer to his heart than anyone, was yet unable to instil into him a sense of personal responsibility. In fact John respected no one, and his mother least of all at this time.

Mrs Mytton's bewildered and terrible grief at her husband's early death presently gave way to an intense determination that all should be set in perfect order for her son, and this may have strengthened her feeling against remarriage. When her prescribed

period of mourning was over she could still claim to be an eligible partie, had she so wished. A wealthy widow would not lack suitors, and sympathetic as one must be with the poor bereaved lady it is hard to forgive both her foolish idolatry of John and her failure to provide him with another father.

However, he and Becky were allowed to enjoy a marvellous childhood among the beauties of that lovely countryside, free to wander about the woods and preserves, climb trees, search for birds' eggs and pester the gamekeepers and warreners. What John lacked in discipline he gained in knowledge and love of his lands which he kept to the end of his days when, drowned in brandy, he made one last pathetic pilgrimage to the home of his ancestors, and when all the good things of life had turned to dust and ashes he was to look back with bitter regret on those sunlit times when it seemed as though the world had been made for him.

Light enough those years for a child, but dark for the land facing the perils of invasion and threats of the Corsican General Bonaparte. The squires continued to send their gamekeepers for training in the use of an army musket, and to subsidise troops of cavalry raised from the personnel of their own estates, although they did not for one moment believe that the French would ever set foot upon British soil. The milords who, in pre-Revolutionary days, had dallied expensively in the French capital were joining the armed forces and troops of militia, furnishing their own kits and horses, servants and victuals as though it was some sort of glorious picnic, and these brave times were already producing heroes whose names were repeated with bated breath by young Britons eager for glory, Cornwallis, Sir John Jervis, Nelson and a young Sepoy general called Arthur Wellesley.

But for the northern squires, whose lands did not abut on the English Channel, rural life went on very much as usual among these alarms and excursions, with ploughing, sowing, reaping at their appointed seasons, huntsmen and hounds abroad in the early autumn mornings, fowlers out on the marshes with their long, clumsy duck-guns. In the remoter areas many old customs

were still kept up in manor and homestead, and the old festivals observed, for the pride in tradition and the achievements of the past had not yet been dimmed by the shadow of industrialism. At Halston it was usual to bake bread each week for distribution to the poor, and at harvest time a bull was slaughtered for all to share at the feast which followed the safe gathering of the crops, the Squire and his family joining in the merry-making.

There was a naivety and innocence among those whose roots were in the country. They found immense pleasure in the simplest pastimes, and many in later life looked back to their childhood with longing, although hunger and poverty had threatened. John himself, as a little boy, had known the purest delight in wandering about the Halston demesne clinging to the mole-catcher's smock, or watching the hedging and ditching from the safe eminence of the bailiff's cob. He was sharp and inquisitive and very little missed his eager eyes; his knack with animals enabled him to enter the mysteries of husbandry at an age when most children were playing with their Noah's Ark.

The men on the estate encouraged him, admiring his spirit and good looks. Their wives were ready to pet him, and feed him on the new bread and sweet milk whenever he came to their cottage doors, but no sooner was he sat down upon the freshly scrubbed settle than he was eager to be off to see a calf, a foal, a litter of puppies, leaving the food forgotten and untasted upon the table.

Presently Mrs Mytton began once more to entertain. The ladies of the neighbouring squires called, took tea in the parlour, and were themselves visited by the widow. They tendered advice on John's upbringing, and some, with the licence permitted to old friends, pointed out the precarious situation of a relict with a young family and the desirability of re-marriage. But Mrs Mytton obstinately clung to her single state and presently the well meant entreaties ceased although there were many forebodings and gloomy prophecies of disaster if the young heir was not summarily brought to heel.

But John's continued happiness was Mrs Mytton's sole desire, and the little boy continued to run wild, so full of pranks and practical jokes that one of the neighbours, Sir Richard Puleston, nicknamed him "Mango, the King of the Pickles", a title that he lived up to heartily for the rest of his life.

His fifth birthday was celebrated during the uneasy peace which followed the Treaty of Amiens; he remembered it as the occasion upon which he was given his first pony. Poor Becky, who adored him and followed him everywhere like a dog, was forgotten and left far behind to sit down and weep plaintively when her short legs could carry her no further. John, having straddled most of the estate animals including the cows and the pigs, found no difficulty in keeping his balance upon his new possession, and before long was urging the pony over fallen logs and other obstacles.

The attendant groom enthusiastically reported that the young Squire had earned promotion to something better than a beginner's mount, and recommended a trappy little Welsh mare with a high action and a leap like a deer. John was delighted, and presently the groom regretted his optimism for it fell to him to catch the mare whenever she unseated her rider.

John was always tumbling off, and although later he had a marvellous power over horses so that they would obey his instant command, he rode by balance and with a heavy hand on the bit. Underhill has stated that he was cruel to his horses because he had bad hands and used such brute force, but it is possible that he never really bothered to learn to ride properly. He could not bear to be controlled or to take orders, and made a very bad pupil in consequence, always impatient to take the next step before he had thoroughly mastered the first.

"I cannot but think that good horsemanship has a great deal to do with the mind," says the elder Miss Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, and certainly an expert, highly trained equestrian possesses a spiritual quality entirely lacking in John. He would not have taken the trouble to learn the complicated routines of *haute école* even if he had been in any way interested in them. A horse

was the means of getting from one place to another as quickly as possible.

He did not venture beyond the park walls when he rode with the groom, and so was unaware of those splendid spectacles which were to delight him later on, but sometimes the distant note of a hunting horn would cause his little mare to prick up her ears and quicken her step; sometimes the cry of hounds would be borne down to him on the wind.

“What’s that?” the child would ask, eagerly, turning his head to listen. The sound set his blood tingling, he wanted to be away and follow, but his groom seized his master’s bridle and pulled the mare round towards home.

John rode back through the parkland where the magnificent oaks towered over his head; one of them, when cut down, had yielded no less than ten tons of timber from its butt. The generous and beautiful gardens at the back of the mansion were separated from meadowland by a ha-ha, providing an unbroken view of the ancient family chapel beside a splendid lake; the child gazed across it and thought, it is all mine.



CHAPTER TWO



SHREWD observers had expressed the opinion that Bonaparte was playing for time, and that when he felt himself strong enough he would resume hostilities. In the spring of 1803 these intentions could no longer be doubted, and the British people prepared once more to stand against their enemy, knowing that he had never been beaten and that his whole fury must inevitably be directed against them.

The troops along the South coast manned the Martello towers, the Volunteer companies and the Fencibles vied with each other in military skill and smartness of turnout. "Let the Frogs come," said the nation. "And God damn them!"

John led the estate children in his own private Home Guard, and the less popular amongst them were detailed off to be Frenchmen. Many were the invasions that these gallant young Salopians repelled with sticks and stones, many a wailing infant returned home with a bloody nose, but for all that the war scarcely touched this ordered, peaceful household, except when the recruiting sergeant came to Oswestry or Shrewsbury in his gay

uniform and fluttering ribbons to lure one of the serving men to the colours.

Mrs Mytton now insisted that John be at her side to do the honours in his father's house, and to extend hospitality to all who might come there, but she never dreamed, as he bowed with courtly grace over their hands, how he despised the superficiality of his mother's female friends, and the heavy patronage of their husbands.

He sat next to her in his broadcloth and ruffles, listening to the gossip which he only half understood. They said that the old King had become mad after a chill caught inspecting the Volunteers, and that the Prince of Wales was already preening himself in the hope of becoming Regent. John's eyes sparkled; he had heard about this gentleman before and it seemed that the life of a Prince must indeed be delightful if it could cause the women to hiss so spitefully behind their fans, and the men to redden angrily. He had learned early that personally satisfying actions were usually anathema to those in authority.

His mother's guests sipped their Madeira and turned to other topics. A Lambeth man had just invented an elliptical spring which was to alter radically the shape of coaches and carriages, and an elegant little vehicle called a curriple was beginning to appear in smart circles. It was rumoured that the Prince had ordered one of these attractive conveyances which ran on two wheels and took a pair of horses, thus making it suitable both for town use and for a sporting young blood to drive.

John listened with interest; this was something he could understand, for when his mother had visitors he was away as soon as he could to the coach-house to examine their equipages with minute care. The grooms and coachmen were used to him and answered his eager questions as though he were a valued colleague. Sometimes he made suggestions of his own which caused raised eyebrows and appreciative chuckles.

He was beginning to spend more and more time among the ostlers and stable-boys, picking up a rich variety of language and a great deal of expert knowledge. Such schooling as he had came from his mother, but she was quite unable to compete with the

attraction of a new horse or dog, or even with the sunshine when John could see, out of the window, a clear blue sky and the green Halston fields. Deep within him, so deep that he was scarcely aware of it except as an unexplained restlessness, he longed for the father in whom he could never confide, and he withdrew behind a barrier of lonely independence which led to much misunderstanding later in his life, and caused many people to declare him cold, unfeeling and heartless.

Like most boys John dreamed of wider horizons. When he came into his inheritance London should see him; he had heard his mother's friends talk of the delights of that city, of the pleasure gardens, the assembly rooms, the gaming tables, the Park where the Prince of Wales rode daily, but he was only seven years old; too young even to join the Army and fight Napoleon.

He was feeling the first pricks of that deadly boredom which drove him to such excesses in later life. He was highly intelligent; and his over-active brain needed continual stimulation; physical exertion was insufficient to damp down his exuberant personality. Long before his tenth birthday he had climbed every accessible tree on the estate, and inspected at close quarters both the rookery and the herony, the latter being a rarity in those parts.

John had inherited altogether six properties, five in Shropshire and one in Wales, and their yearly value, irrespective of rents, amounted to some ten thousand pounds, and the sum which accumulated during his minority was almost sixty thousand, in those days a very great fortune. No wonder that parents of daughters began early to lay their plans, hoping to be first in the field when the young Squire became of marriageable age. They brought their demure, ringleted girls with them when they called, smiling fondly at the handsome little boy, but many a miss returned to her mother in tears crying that Jackie Mytton's pranks were not to be borne. He was always forgiven, though; no one could resist his charm for long, but Mrs Mytton was at last becoming seriously alarmed at his behaviour.

Her many friends were constantly warning her that John would have to be pulled up from his wilful, heedless progress and

steadied down into the sober and sensible paces demanded of an heir of Halston, but he had approached his ninth birthday before she finally realised that she was not adequate to the task of directing him. Sensibly, she sought advice.

A new curate, a distant relative of hers, had come recently to Whittington, the next village to Halston, and having called upon Mrs Mytton in recognition of their family ties, found her an amiable hostess. Friendship thus established, the Reverend William Wynne Owen was frequently at Halston and became a respected member of the family circle. One day Mrs Mytton felt able to ask his opinion concerning young John.

“No man was ever more free from guile,” Apperley relates, and Mr Owen unhesitatingly stated that what the boy needed was a tutor. Mrs Mytton suggested, charmingly, that no one was better fitted for the post than himself.

There was a taut silence during which Mr Owen cast his thoughts far and wide. Young Jack was notorious and practically untamable, but hardly anyone, and certainly not Mr Owen, could have resisted the gentle appeal in the widow’s eyes.

He agreed to take up his duties upon John’s ninth birthday, relying, good simple man that he was, upon common sense and tolerance to see him through a difficult situation.

As he had anticipated, his first few weeks proved to be exceedingly uncomfortable, for John was not only allergic to discipline but had reserved some of his more fulsome practical jokes for his preceptor. Once he managed to insert a black pony into Mr Owen’s bedroom from which it ultimately refused to budge having taken an unwarranted fancy to the clergyman; from then on it followed him about like a pet dog, even to the vestry door on Sundays.

Mr Owen realised from the first that some point of mutual acceptance would have to be reached before he had any hope of civilising his pupil. One thing they had in common was their love of horses, Mr Owen, indeed, possessing a prodigious knowledge of the Stud Book, and greatly to his surprise this proved to be the catalyst which broke down John’s reserve.

Amiable discussions on pedigree somehow led to more serious subjects, and after a while Mr Owen and John had reached a working compromise which allowed the latter to do much as he liked while respecting the rights of the former. So it was that Virgil and Cicero took their places on the schoolroom table as well as *The Sporting Magazine*, and when John could be persuaded to sit at his books he was willing and eager to learn. But his grasshopper mind could never settle long on one subject, and presently the texts would be swept to the floor and he would be off to the kennels or the stable, not to be seen again until night-fall.

Mr Owen prayed for guidance, and took as his reward the affection of the family he had come to serve. Had he possessed the means and the opportunity he could have become one of the best types of sporting parson in which the age abounded, riding to hounds three days a week and preaching a splendid sermon on Sundays. He might not have gone as far as one member of his cloth who took a live fox up with him into the pulpit, but Apperley credits him with "having given birth to as much sport as ever was seen in a race, a cockpit, or a fox chase".

Gradually, by his own peculiar methods, he began to repair the damage done by the early years of neglect, and John, almost without realising it, turned to the young clergyman as he might have done to his father.

Early in November of this year 1805 England heard of the victory of Trafalgar, and of the romantic death of Lord Nelson in the hour of his triumph. John was shown a likeness of the famous Admiral by a weeping servant who had never even seen the sea; when later Nelson's body was brought back to the tomb in St Paul's there fell upon the watching thousands such a silence that it seemed as though the very stones of London mourned with them.

Mr Owen echoed the Tory sentiments of his employers by crediting the inception of Trafalgar to William Pitt, returned to power after the collapse of the Peace of Amiens in place of the vacillating Addington, and when the Prime Minister died early

in 1806 he lost no time in explaining to John how he might profit by a study of the great man's life and works.

The Squire, however, had other things on his mind. He was determined, by now, to become England's most famous sportsman, longing for the time when he could run his own pack of hounds and envying from the bottom of his heart the sons of neighbouring squires who were out of the schoolroom and able to enjoy the delights of hunting whenever they wished.

He and Mr Owen had had some pleasant sessions recently studying *The Sporting Magazine* during working hours, and discussing the recent appointment of Mr Thomas Assheton Smith as Master of the Quorn in succession to Lord Foley.

This celebrated Hunt had been, as John well knew, for forty-seven years the province of the great Hugo Meynell, called by many "The Father of Foxhunting" although Apperley disputes this title with John Warde of the Craven. Meynell, however, was the first to impose order and discipline upon those who rode to hounds, so that what had formerly been a harum-scarum steeplechase was transformed into a precise science.

Before his time a fox had been looked upon as a vermin scarcely worth the following, and certainly no one had taken the trouble to breed hounds especially for that purpose. Prior to 1750 there were no regular packs, although most country gentlemen would keep a couple or two which they combined with their neighbours' if they wanted a day's sport. Apperley suggests that they may have been similar to the large Welsh rough-haired terriers which could be put to fox, hare or rabbit. It was probably sheer chance that one day put up a straight-necked fox which gave such excellent sport that men began to inquire into the further possibilities of it, and to combine their hounds into packs kept solely for the purpose.

When Meynell took over the Quorn he found the pace too slow for his liking. The only way to kill a good fox was to run him hard so that he never got too far ahead, and gradually a type of hound was evolved which was fast, compact, well-nosed, full of stamina and capable of sticking to a line. Meynell was, in fact,

responsible for the ancestors of the modern foxhound, but owing to his habit of putting them to hares in the spring to keep them fit they were not always reliable.

Not everyone agreed with his methods of breeding, and his very success with the Quorn gave rise to much jealousy. Among the worst offenders, unhappily, was John Warde himself. Already prejudiced in favour of the old-style heavy hound, he refused to acknowledge his rival's principles, and even went so far as to show off two of his weeds as examples of Quorn stock, calling them *Queer'un* and *Quornite*.

Fortunately for the future of English fox-hunting Meynell refused to be put off by ridicule, and when Assheton Smith took over the Mastership both horses and hounds were beginning to reach the peak of perfection demanded by a sporting aristocracy.

The tradition of bold, fearless riding over open country was well established before John was in his teens, and each county had its legendary feats of horsemanship. We can be sure that he was familiar with, and envied, the reputations of such men as Dick Christian, that great rider whose career took him all over the Shires, and who once jumped a flock of sheep when out with the Cottesmore; George Osbaldeston, Frederick Ponsonby and Assheton Smith himself, who was reputed to have taken off over a ravine twenty-one feet wide and twelve feet deep. He was riding a horse called *Guildford*, a notorious puller, and with hounds on a screaming scent few men were likely to consider their actions at such a time.

The annals of the Cottesmore can also provide details of the tremendous run of twenty-six miles which came to be known as "The Prince of Wales Day", since the heir to the throne took part in it. "But he was nowhere, bless you," said Dick Christian to The Druid. "They gave him the brush, though, just to please him."

John followed hounds for the excitement and not for the pleasure of seeing them work, which was one reason why he did not make a particularly good Master later on. He did not take the trouble to study the sport in which he so actively engaged, although there was no one to touch him over country.



Thomas Assheton Smith, M.F.H.



Dick Christian

The farmers over whose land the Hunt rode with considerable and often devastating effect were surprisingly sympathetic; some of them turned out regularly, of course, but many did not.

The secret lay in avoiding, as far as possible, the boundaries of those known to harbour a grudge. This John always did, and because he was extremely well liked in the neighbourhood the passage of his hounds was usually greeted with a cheer.

Grantley Berkeley was less lucky. One day when he was running a stag it chose to seek refuge in the barn of a man called Baker, who had long been waiting to take the Hunt to court for trespass. Since Berkeley was obliged to seek out his hounds he had no defence, and Baker was awarded one hundred pounds damages.

Such cases as this were comparatively rare since Hunts were often over-generous in meeting payments for damage, and, prior to the formation of subscription packs, hounds were owned and hunted by wealthy squires whose tenants were only too eager to accommodate them.

John was so open-handed that he often settled the most frivolous claims without question; it gave him a good name but was responsible in part for the terrible drain on his income which drove him in the end to bankruptcy. Like many another young man newly come into a fortune, as soon as he had money in his pocket he was scattering it freely in many directions, for hunting had become an industry supporting large numbers of people. Saddlers, loriners, hatters and tailors all took their share of the business; breeders and dealers appeared in every hunting centre, and strong lads were in constant demand as strappers and hunt servants.

It even appeared to have a medical value.

"To the usual occupations . . . has been added the amusement of hunting, which I have resumed to the great benefit of my health and the complete fugitation of all critical deposits in consequence of high living," Sam Whitbread wrote to Creevey in the winter of 1808.

But not everyone regarded the sport in the same favourable

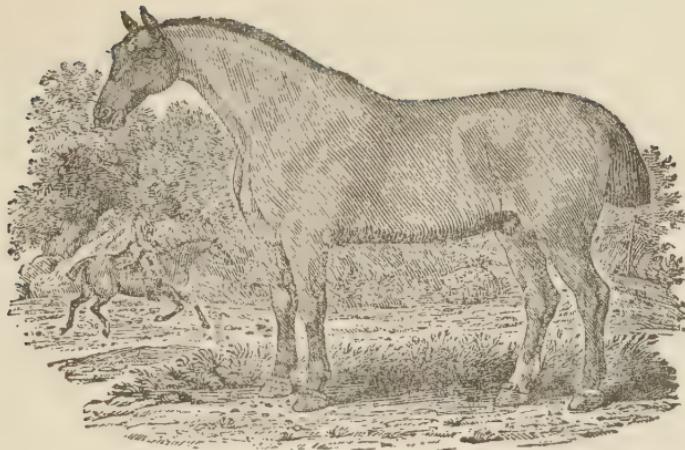
light. Dr William Paley, author of the *Evidences*, wrote, "A parcel of men, with vacant minds, meet at covert-side. The dogs smell a stink, they run, and the men gallop after them. That's hunting."

In the spring of 1807 John was running his own pack of harriers, the ingrained sporting instincts of a country child having been precociously developed by his early association with all the "characters" who frequented the stables and the servants' quarters. Whether Dr William Paley would have been influenced to alter his opinions after watching John's hilarious progress with his unruly followers will never be known, but the Halston villagers declared it to be the funniest spectacle they had seen in years.

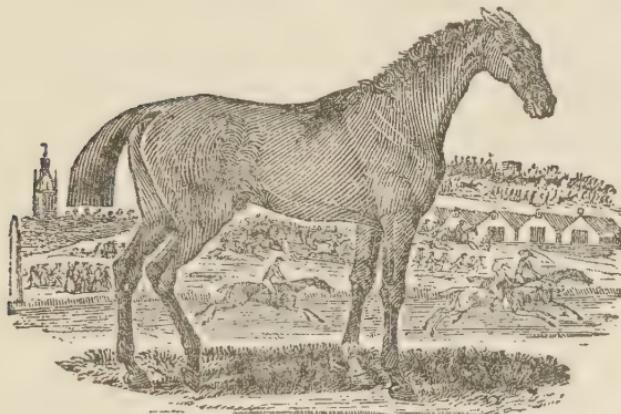
This was an area served by several packs, the Shropshire and Shifnal (now the Albrighton), the Shropshire Hounds, and the Cheshire. Further to the north-west lay Wynnstay country, hunted by Sir Watkyn Williams Wynn, so that later on John could travel to the four corners of the county enjoying the hospitality of his friends and the variety of their sport.

Now, at ten years of age, he was almost totally independent of his mother and closer than ever to Mr Owen who had established a genuine bond of affection between them. He could not resist an occasional practical joke, although these were now less frequent, so that when Mr Owen ascended to the pulpit one Sunday morning he pulled from his pocket not his carefully prepared notes but a copy of *The Sporting Magazine*.

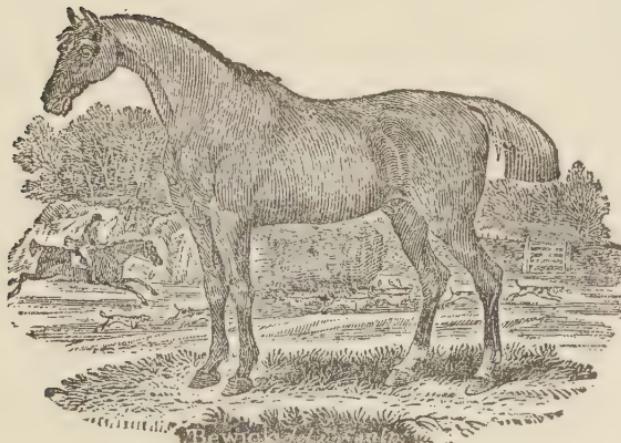
"He found his mistake, and of course had nothing to do but to apologize to his hearers for the lack of his sermon" we are told, although his feelings may be imagined. At table, after grace, he would try to keep the conversation on spiritual matters in the hope that some of it, at least, would be swallowed with the larded capon, but his young charge was not so easily persuaded. One sermon on Sundays was sufficient, and he deftly changed the subject to the all important topic of horses. After a while Mrs Mytton would withdraw and leave the young man and the boy to argue amicably about the relative merits of the Highflyer and Matchem strains which had made Shropshire-bred horses especially valuable both as hunters and racers.



The Hunter



The Race-horse



The Old English Road-horse

by Thomas Bewick

These halcyon days were drawing to a close, for John was to be sent away to school.

He was furious. He had no desire whatever to come under any sort of alien discipline, the life he was leading suited him admirably and he saw no reason at all to change it for any other.

He wheedled, cajoled, beguiled, but to his great surprise Mrs Mytton for once stood firm and he was enrolled as a Town Boy at Westminster School where his father and grandfather had been before him. Once the decision was made John accepted it with good grace, and when, on June 5th, 1807, he left Halston for the first time to travel to Shrewsbury to pick up the mail coach, he was full of excitement.

What an adventure for an eleven-year-old! Perched up on the top of the coach with his guns and fishing rods, watching between the horses' ears the road unwind, John wondered what he would find in London. He was so interested in everything on the journey that he forgot to be homesick, and there were always motherly ladies to attend to his needs at the inns and post houses. The coachmen, too, attracted by his cheerful, cheeky expression, would let him hold the ribbons for one brief glorious moment, for there was no more stirring picture than the mail, painted chocolate brown picked out with scarlet, clipping along with a thoroughbred team, the guard blowing a Tantivy. Roads had greatly improved since the turn of the century due to better methods of surfacing; new styles of carriage building meant faster traffic and more communications between the towns. The best method of public transport was the mail coach, sponsored by the Post Office; the privately owned stage coaches then on the road were slow and uncomfortable. It was not until the 1820's that trunk routes were taken over by able, efficient coachmasters and the public services began to pay their way.

The men who drove the crack mails were famous, and revered as a pop singer is today. The young bloods copied their favourites as much as they could by learning the jargon of the road and wearing appropriate clothes, the many-caped greatcoat and the low-crowned hat. One young gentleman had his teeth filed so that

he could whistle through them in the approved fashion; many braved the worst weather conditions in order to be in the honoured place by the driver.

The Prince of Wales himself was a famous whip, driving his fast curricle from Brighton to London in the record time of four and a half hours in order to win a bet; and Sir John Lade's wife, the notorious Lady Letty, who was supposed to have begun her career in her husband's kitchen, once wagered a rival that she could not drive a coach and eight over a given distance.

When driving became fashionable men purchased the most elegant turn-outs they could afford, the harness adorned with filigree, silver plate and tooled leather, with a variety of long- and short-cheeked driving bits on which was lavished all the loriner's art. Little was thought of the horses' comfort, and much cruelty was practised for smartness's sake. It was still the method to crop horses' ears, and Lord Winterton imagined that such maimed animals were a distinct breed, born as such. It was most unusual to see a horse without a docked tail; even the gentle Charles Waterton was forced by ridicule to follow the fashion after humanely letting his young stock keep their tails.

John, who would be as reckless with his harness horses as he was with his hunters, absorbed all he could upon the journey south. By the time he reached London he had almost forgotten Halston, and was looking forward eagerly to starting his new life.

But he was determined not to learn anything at school beyond a smattering of Horace, and how to use his fists, which was all a gentleman needed to know.



CHAPTER THREE



THE great house settled down to a quiet routine when the master had gone; the ponies ceased to crane their necks eagerly over the stable door at each sound of footsteps in the yard, and Mrs Mytton no longer sighed over some memento of her tempestuous son. His clothes were folded away in the press, the harriers returned to their kennels, and all laid in readiness until he should come again.

Mrs Mytton was congratulated on the step she had taken. Her friends assured her that it would be the salvation of young Jack, and yet she was uneasy. Public schools were tough places before Dr Arnold put his theories into practice at Rugby and made it a model for others to follow, and a boy needed to have spirit and a quick wit to survive.

John lacked neither, and after he had fought his mill and knocked down everyone in sight he was accepted as a sportsman and permitted to join the cock-fighting circle where heavy bets

were wagered on the result of a main. The birds were carefully hidden from the masters, one enterprising lad making a home for his under the floorboards of the dormitory.

Soon John was in financial difficulties. Four hundred pounds a year did not go far among a set of raffish twelve-year-olds who would certainly give today's magistrates something to think about, and because he was still a Ward in Chancery he would have to ask the Lord Chancellor's permission for any increase in his allowance. He managed to hold out for three years, probably on loans from his mother or the accommodating Mr Owen, but eventually in 1810 he wrote to Lord Eldon, suggesting that as he was about to be married it was necessary for him to have more money.

"Sir," replied Lord Eldon, "if you cannot live on your allowance you may starve, and if you marry I will commit you to prison."

Which seemed to dispose of the matter without further argument.

He was happy enough at school. He loved people and company, the noisier the better, and, except for the last unhappy months of his life, was always surrounded by chosen companions who would sing and drink and play as lustily as he did. He loved to be praised and flattered, although he never tried to show off, and his iron constitution enabled him to make light of injury or disablement. This was the quality that perhaps most endeared him to his companions in that age when everyone admired pluck.

Men were expected to undergo operations without anaesthetics, to endure fearful wounds on the battlefield without crying out, and to test their hearts and spirits in all sorts of dangerous sports.

George Osbaldeston, after a steeplechase accident, was obliged to lie for weeks with his leg between pillows since the surgeons could not splint it, and this meant that it had to be reset every morning.

"I used actually to be in a perspiration . . . knowing what I should have to undergo," he tells us with apparent surprise.

Boxers punched each other insensible, and when Tom Cribb and Bob Gregson fought each other for the Championship in 1806, the bout went on until both men were unconscious, the prize going to Cribb because he managed to stay longest on his feet.

This determination not to be beaten was especially characteristic of John, and if he had been old enough to join the Army at this time when Arthur Wellesley was beginning to get the better of Soult and Marmont in Spain, he would have been typical of the young men who were forming the officer cadre. Obstinate, tenacious and patriotic, they overcame the most difficult situations by simply ignoring the possibility of defeat.

But he was only a schoolboy during the years of the Peninsular War, and the stirring accounts of Talavera, Busaco and Albuera had to come second-hand from those who had brothers or fathers in the fighting. However, the Westminster boys were usually too busy with their own affairs to worry much about a war that seemed as far away as the moon. They were able to shoot snipe and duck on the marshes of Belgravia, and go fishing on the numerous ponds and streams in the neighbourhood, but in spite of these distractions John missed his hounds and his ponies.

He could read in *The Sporting Magazine* of the exploits of men like Osbaldeston, who at that time was one of the most remarkable sportsmen in the country. At twenty-one years of age he had already made a name for himself as a horseman, boxer, marksman and cricketer. He was a fine tennis player and oarsman, and after coming down from Oxford hunted the Burford for five seasons with hounds which he bought from Lord Monson. Like Assheton Smith he worked to improve their strain, and when he presently succeeded to the Quorn there was no one to touch him as a breeder of hounds. He was liked by everyone and remained modest and good-tempered in spite of his fame. "Just what an English gentleman should be," said Apperley; and if John had possessed a tenth part of Osbaldeston's firmness of character he too could have lived to a ripe old age after settling down to a good, comfortable marriage, for their tastes and outlook

were remarkably similar. Both were devoted to the "illiberal sports of guns, dogs and horses" which Lord Chesterfield had criticised, and which some people were beginning to accept as the hallmarks of a corrupt, reactionary, anti-progressive class.

The traditional, red-faced, port-swilling squire would presently become a hated social symbol, yet these diehard Tories divined more clearly than their Radical opponents the true nature of Bonaparte's threat to their freedom, and would not rest until he and his generals had surrendered. Their steadfastness never wavered during the twenty long years of war, yet their loyalty to Crown and Church underwent considerable strain when it became known at the end of 1810 that King George was again *non compos mentis*, and that a Regency was imminent.

Princess Amelia, the youngest and best beloved of the King's daughters, died in October and her father was shocked into the madness from which he was never to recover. The Commons, however, were reluctant to prepare the Act which would place supreme power into the hands of the Prince of Wales, and it was not until February 5th, 1811, that the Regency came into being.

George P.R. celebrated with lavish and extravagant hospitality, delighting a society which had become bored to distraction with the parsimonious drabness of his father's Court. Carlton House was thrown open in a series of glittering fêtes and levees, almost at the same time as the doors of Westminster School were being shut firmly and irrevocably upon a pugnacious and recalcitrant John Mytton. It is not known what he had done to deserve expulsion; perhaps his fighting spirit was more than the staff could cope with conveniently, with any of the means at their disposal.

There was nothing for it but to return to Halston for the time being until further plans for his future could be made. He was still only fifteen years old, far too young to have completed his education, and it remained to be seen whether any other school could be persuaded to take him.

Finally it was arranged for him to go to Harrow in the Lent

term of 1812. He spent the intervening months morosely and aimlessly at Halston, and his mother found him changed. He was invariably courteous in her company, but could hardly disguise his impatience to leave it and be among the grooms and ostlers in the stables. He had long since left her woman's world.

Mr Owen remained close, but he had got the measure of John and knew when to temper censure with tact; the relationship between them remained amicable but the young clergyman felt that in some subtle way the emphasis had shifted and that John no longer looked upon him as a father, but as an understanding elder brother.

The confidences he shared with the boy confirmed his secret opinion that a further spell at school, even such a famous establishment as Harrow, would be of no benefit. John's sole desire was to learn as little as possible in order to make more time for sport, and this hardly seemed to accord with the purpose of an expensive and exclusive education. It was most unfortunate that Europe was closed to the Grand Tour; a couple of years on the Continent in an elegant and civilised atmosphere was the best school for a gentleman of means.

But the time came when John's boxes had to be put up for the journey to Shrewsbury and the London mail; he felt his mother's tears warm upon his cheek, the firm handshake of Mr Owen, and caught a last glimpse of a fluttering handkerchief as the gig rolled away down the drive.

His sojourn upon the Hill was short-lived, lasting only three terms. During that time he fought no less than eight pitched battles, after which the authorities asked for his removal, no doubt to make room for a more tractable boy.

Mrs Mytton and Mr Owen were once more landed with their black sheep, stocky, powerful, pugnacious, and without any particular outlet for his extraordinary energies.

However, he had acquired a good knowledge of Greek and Latin, and was able, even at the very end of his life, to pull out the appropriate tags and quotations from the Classic authors.

He had also learned to drink.

Schoolboys of that time were expected to tipple like men and to hold their liquor; most of them came to little harm but it was fatal for John. The foundations of alcoholism were laid at this early age when he was introduced to the pleasures of wine and he began the slow process of poisoning himself, yet it could not have been foreseen or prevented.

How was anyone to tell a man of that day and era that he should never take anything stronger than water! Drinking was a social obligation among persons of John's class; they knew that obesity and gout were two of the penalties that had to be paid for this indulgence and they accepted them cheerfully, some even secretly proud of their infirmities.

Mrs Mytton was not in the least astonished when John demonstrated his virility by downing a bottle of port after dinner; he was a man now and if her husband had been alive he too would have applauded his son's capacity. She was alarmed, however, by his violent temper which had always been apparent even as a little boy, but seemed now to be coming more and more to the surface.

He would flare up into sudden bursts of rage when he scarcely knew what he was about, and this may have been the reason for his hasty withdrawal from the home of a Berkshire gentleman where he was sent to be tutored.

Mrs Mytton had tried this as a last resort, but it was even less successful than the other scholastic ventures, for after several disagreements with his tutor John knocked the unfortunate man down.

Mr Owen now took a hand, and tried to persuade John to enter a University.

"My good sir, you must go to Oxford. You must indeed, sir," he pleaded.

"I'll see you damned first!" John retorted ungraciously, but Mr Owen was used to this and resorted to guile.

"Every man of fortune ought to go to Christ Church, if only for a term or two."

To his great surprise and delight, John agreed.

"I don't mind going, provided I read nothing but the Racing Calendar and the Stud Book."

Mr Owen had no hesitation in recommending them.

"Excellent books, sir, they will do very well indeed."

John was entered for both Oxford and Cambridge, and made up his mind to attend the latter. He ordered three pipes of port, addressed to himself, to be sent there, and that was the nearest he ever got to it. Perhaps it was for the best. Imagination boggles at the thought of John in College. No ancient façade would have been safe from him, nor any pinnacled saint upon whom could be perched a night receptacle. The pipes of port might have made him a most popular undergraduate, but sooner or later he would have come into conflict with authority and suffered the usual ignominious return to Halston.

But the way to the Continent was to be opened sooner than Mr Owen imagined. The winter of 1812 had been a long and terrible one for the French armies when the attack on Russia had ended in utter rout and disaster. Arthur Wellesley, now the Duke of Wellington, had struck at Salamanca and was chasing the demoralised French towards the Pyrenees, and the Battle of Leipzig, in October, 1813, resulted in a shattering defeat for Bonaparte.

Early in the New Year of 1814 the Allies invaded France, and on February 21st a post-chaise decked with laurels and drawn by foam-flecked horses sped towards London with the news of the death in battle of the French Emperor. This had an immediate effect upon the Stock Exchange, and after cleaning up a small fortune the owners of the post-chaise beat a hasty retreat. There were plenty of rumours during those months when France was collapsing and the end of twenty years of war seemed in sight, but on March 28th Paris surrendered and a week later Britain heard of the end of Bonaparte.

Deserted by his Marshals, denied a glorious death at the head of his armies, the Emperor abdicated, alone in the ruins of his grand design.

For John the end of the war meant the end of the University scheme and he abandoned it without further delay. He was free to go abroad now, and as soon as he could he set off for Paris.

There are no details of what he did when he arrived, but it is hardly likely that he spent much time in the Louvre examining Bonaparte's magnificent collection of looted art treasures, now on public exhibition. Mrs Mytton hoped that her son would sow his wild oats far from his native land and having got these irregularities out of his system would return home a reformed and exemplary character.

But John came back at the end of the year wilder than ever, driven home by lack of funds, and he was received with open arms by the sporting fraternity for miles round.

The bookmakers, cardsharers and broken down jockeys who frequented the Oswestry pubs knew him well, and the seedy gentlemen crouched in the darkest corners of the taproom stirred themselves. The Squire was usually good for a touch or a pint for he had never learned frugality, and to the end of his days was always susceptible to anyone with a hard luck story.

“Here comes Mytton!” they would cry as the broad-shouldered, amiable young man came clattering down the street in his elegant gig, cutting the corners with a dash and pulling the thoroughbred up on to its haunches; he barely had time to alight before a crowd collected round him. It was characteristic that he seldom went anywhere without attracting attention of one sort or another; the tearaways respected him as a useful man with his fists and the daughters of the local gentlefolk looked upon him kindly for “he had not a handsome face but by no means an unpleasing countenance, and without having practised the graces, the airs and character of a gentleman were strongly impressed upon his carriage”.

The miserable allowance went nowhere, of course, and he was chronically in debt, but so were many others in those days and his expectations were enormous. Since he never troubled his head about money and just took what pleased him at the moment, opportunities for bilking him were legion, but he was always able

to spot a doubtful bargain where animals were concerned. Dealers soon took the habit of presenting only the best for his inspection, and left to himself he chose well and astutely. But he was easily swayed by stronger wills than his own, and later on was badly swindled by an associate.

Sir Watkyn Williams Wynn's pad-groom declared that if he was given two hundred thousand pounds per annum he would be in debt in five, and his frenzied generosity was a symptom of the dark future which lay ahead, as was the gradual increase in the amount of port wine he consumed. Halston parties now continued far into the night, especially when his young hunting and shooting friends came over for the sport, yet John was up and ready next morning to be early about his business.

He had a constitution of iron and refused to wear warm clothes even in the coldest weather, but once, after laying down in the snow in his shirt to wait for wildfowl, he paid for his foolhardiness by a severe illness.

His mother was continually anxious about him. Most of the time she never knew where he was and knew no peace of mind until the familiar stocky figure hurled into her boudoir surrounded by a pack of noisy dogs.

Yet in spite of his wildness John looked after the land well, and was a good and sensible farmer of between three and four hundred acres. Soon he was accounted the best in that part of the county, and won many prizes at the shows for his grain samples. Once he missed the blue riband because his barley was found to contain, of all things, a quantity of wild oats. He knew every ridge and furrow of his fertile fields for he had tramped them since childhood, and his fervent love for them revealed an unexpected side of his unstable and complex character.

Yet perhaps it was not so surprising that the slow rhythm of the seasons, and the unhurrying cycle of the land should appeal to his mercurial temperament. His ancestors had driven their roots deep into the Shropshire soil and had returned to its safe embrace when their lives were over, and he was as much a part of his environment as the great oaks which stood in the park.

He walked the headlands with his bailiff watching the ploughmen at work, and perhaps of all the moments in his life these were the happiest when he stood upon his own land with the smell of newly turned earth in his nostrils.

Foreign visitors were always amazed at the extent to which Britain was cultivated, and even the lightest soil, when folded with turnip-fed sheep, could produce adequate crops. Certainly the Enclosure Acts had brought misery and hardship, but they had enabled farming to be done on a much more economic scale and the war had made it imperative that large quantities of grain, pigs, sheep and milk should be produced to feed a growing population.

The English countryman was invariably conservative and had been slow to accept the improvements which far-seeing, wealthy squires like Coke of Holkham and Robert Bakewell had brought about on their own estates, but those who did soon became convinced that agriculture must cease to be the haphazard affair that village politics tended to make it.

New methods of crop-raising and stockbreeding had increased yields a hundredfold, but they needed co-operation and a central control. It was decided, reluctantly in many cases, that more Enclosure Acts were needed and not less, and what had seemed to be the unalterable pattern of centuries gradually gave way to a ruthless and more scientific design.

Tenants of great estates like Halston now lived in far greater security than the small yeoman farmers, although the latter had been the backbone of the rural communities since time immemorial. All John's people felt safe and were grateful to him for an attitude which reflected his own philosophy. They knew he would never exploit them because that required an effort of the kind he was not prepared to make; as long as the rents came in regularly and he had money in his pocket he could not be bothered to devise methods of obtaining more. On the contrary, anyone who came to him with a tale of woe was likely to have his rent rescinded and sent away with a guinea for his family.

The economics of his estates never interested him in the least; he was content to leave these things to his agents and so never appreciated the fact that they were honest men. Had they not been so his bankruptcy would have occurred far sooner and more disastrously, but somehow they managed to keep things going and dam up sufficient capital to carry out the essential repairs and renovations.

Many owners of country property were engaged in alterations and improvements at that time, for the Classic style was much admired and the old Tudor houses were considered dated and vulgar. Gardens and pleasantries were laid out according to the ideas of Repton and Capability Brown, but although Mrs Mytton talked enthusiastically of her neighbours' plans John was not prepared to carry out the refinements that she would have liked.

He was not a gardening man and did not care much for prospects, foregrounds, side-screens, light and shade, but he had an eye for a good game covert and did not lose any opportunities for improving sport.

"A few large earths near your home are certainly desirable as they will draw the foxes thither and after a long day will sometimes bring you home," Peter Beckford had said. John insisted that any trees cut down were replaced with seedlings in order not to spoil the natural landscape which afforded shelter for many birds and beasts.

The estate teemed with partridges and John was an excellent shot although it was not his favourite sport. He made a point of killing fifty brace on the opening day with his own gun, and he once did the same thing later in the season for a fifty-guinea bet.

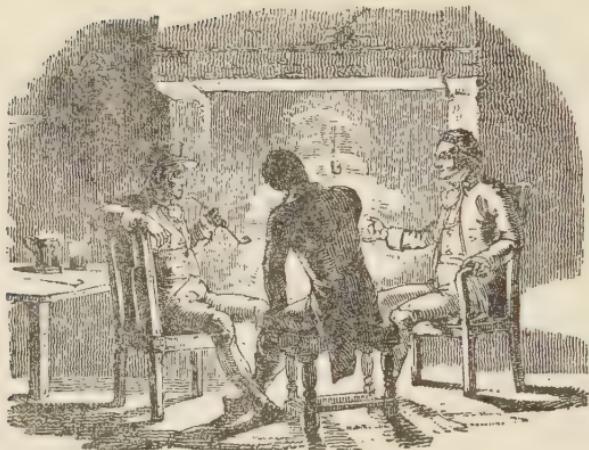
He liked to shoot over his Merioneth estate where there were extensive grouse moors, and he enjoyed many happy days there with three or four friends during his annual visit, tramping to the butts among that glorious Welsh scenery.

The average bag there was thirty brace a day, enough to show a profit on the season, and John always thoroughly enjoyed the stay in the cosy, pleasant shooting box where a man could relax

with his companions after a good dinner and a bottle of wine. He often wished that his stay there could be twice as long, but when the bad times came Dinas Mowddy was among the first pieces of property to be sold.



CHAPTER FOUR



JOHN was passing his time aimlessly enough since his return from the Continent. He allowed the days to go by among his hounds and horses, visiting the neighbours, or taking a trip to Shrewsbury or Chester during the racing season. Any hopes that he might follow the example set by his father and interest himself in local affairs were soon stifled; Mrs Mytton reproached him, for it was many years since a Squire of Halston had taken his place in county society, and soon he would come of age and be considering marriage. John listened courteously, he would think about it some other time; at the moment he was content to be welcomed everywhere for his family's sake and his own, since he was brave, winsome and good company, and if his table talk among the gentlemen was more bawdy than witty no one thought the worse of him for that.

He was kindly, but withdrawn, in the company of ladies, but

the Shrewsbury tavern girls knew another side of him and presently spicy stories of his amorous adventures began to be whispered in County drawing rooms. A gentleman, however, was allowed a certain amount of licence, and a sensibly brought up woman was taught to accept it as part of life, so that many married couples continued on excellent terms with one another under conditions that nowadays would speedily bring them to the divorce courts.

The Regent himself, tied to a wife whom he detested, maintained a curious *ménage à trois* with the Hertfords which had begun as political expediency, but soon developed on his part into a pathetic desire for the Countess which her husband was pleased to encourage, and apparently they did not think less of one another.

John's liaisons were not dignified enough to be termed love affairs. They were begun to satisfy a whim or a curiosity; they ended as quickly as they started with no one any the worse and usually the girl went off with a substantial present of money.

The curious morality that existed among rogues at that time made them treat this generosity with deference; John was a "right 'un" and although he went into some strange and unsavoury places he was never deliberately harmed. Perhaps his power over savage and uncontrollable animals extended also to men, and certainly anyone who met him in a fair fight did not care to tackle him a second time.

All this was well enough for a young man finding his way about in the world, but he was also a person of breeding and quality, a squire whose actions were dictated by custom and usage, to be charitable to the poor, lenient to his debtors, protective to his tenants, and to uphold the honour of his house and lineage.

Such behaviour to John was instinctive; he did not need to be told what to do and sometimes his tolerance was an embarrassment.

The Game Laws, for instance, were harsh and unfair, "a tyrannical bloody and senseless farrago of ancient rubbish," says Alken, but nevertheless many landowners felt that their property could only be adequately protected by their application. A man

could be transported for poaching, and if he were caught fighting with the gamekeepers he could be executed; many were maimed and even killed by spring-guns and mantraps. John never permitted the use of these inhuman devices and if any poachers were brought before him he was likely to give them a parcel of game to take home to their families, for there were many hungry mouths now that the price of bread had risen so astronomically and the Government was powerless to do anything about it.

The science of economics was in its infancy, and men secure in the ownership of their great estates were totally unable to grasp the new principles which were emerging as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The squire's dependents were like his own family and treated, in nearly every case, with kindness and consideration. How then to visualise the new poor, the dispossessed, who had fled from their ancestral fields after the Enclosure Acts, to find squalid refuge in the great manufacturing towns among hundreds of others in a similar plight.

These wretched creatures had neither future nor hope; their old ties broken and without a tradition to maintain them they swarmed into the dank alleys round the factories. Their children were doomed, as they were, to a life of bondage and oppression, ironic enough in a country whose humanitarian principles had been responsible for the abolition of the slave trade, whose strength still lay in the close relationship between master and man.

There was no public relief, no unemployment pay for those unfortunate enough to be out of work; they watched, bitterly, while public money was poured out on entertainments for the visiting foreign royalty who came to London in the summer of 1814, culminating in a splendid fête on August 1st, the one hundredth anniversary of Hanoverian rule. It had originally been intended to take place during the visit of the Tsar of Russia, but such was its scope and enterprise that it could not be got ready in time; the Regent's ambitious schemes included a re-enactment of the battles of the Nile and Badajoz, and a marvellous transformation of a Gothic fortress into the Temple of Concord,

complete with coloured lamps, fountains, and splendidly uniformed soldiers holding aloft the Royal Standard.

Not only were there to be reminders of past glories but the enthralled crowds were to be given a glimpse of the future. Daring Mr Sadler, a former employee of the Liverpool Gas Company, was to make an ascent in a balloon. He performed this exciting act so efficiently that he was nearly carried out to sea; the lady, who was to have accompanied him in order to release a white dove as a symbol of peace, was left behind at the last moment. It was considered that her weight would make the balloon unsafe.

The Chinese bridge over the canal in St. James's Park was ornamented by a yellow pagoda, but the criminally dangerous gas jets and lanterns set the structure on fire later in the evening, burning to death two unfortunate people who were admiring its marvels at the time. Nobody cared very much except the relatives of the dead; the drinking booths were too numerous for anyone to remain unhappy for long and after five days there were still considerable crowds who defied all efforts to dislodge them.

John was still in France during these junketings, otherwise he would have thoroughly enjoyed the triumphal processions, speeches, fanfares and banquets which each town and county thought it patriotic and proper to provide.

“It was pleasant to see the hilarity and good humour that prevailed between master and man, to say nothing of the hearty gourmandising of men, women and children,” wrote Elizabeth Ham from Somerset. “After all sorts of loyal toasts, drunk in beer and cider, the company rose from the table for a dance on the green.”

The memories of that glorious summer had faded into the mists of November when John returned to the pleasures of a new hunting season, and his amorous pursuits among the doubtful charms of the ladies of Shrewsbury.

He was more than ever eager to “cut a dash”, and his lack of funds at this time did not prevent him from purchasing a tandem, a fashionable and dangerous form of transport which consisted of a gig drawn by two horses in single file.

It needed great skill to control the leader, who was not confined by pole or shafts, but it was quite possible to travel safely and comfortably with a quiet, well-trained pair. John was immensely proud of his driving ability and bought the first likely team he saw; the groom put them to and he was away helter-skelter, hallooing and whooping as the spirited animals fought against the bit. They came to hand quickly as all his beasts did, and soon he was taking them all over the countryside.

One day he was asked out to dinner by some friends at Cronkhill, about four miles from Shrewsbury. He drove over in the tandem, and after the meal was drawn into a discussion on this method of harnessing horses. Some of the guests declared it to be most unsafe because one had no control over the leader, but by this time the wine had gone to John's head and he immediately laid a wager of twenty-five pounds that he would drive his tandem across country that night for half a mile, crossing a sunken fence, a deep drain, and two quickset hedges.

The bet was taken up by several of the party, to the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds, although others tried to dissuade him from the attempt, and as soon as the moon had risen John set out, guided by the lanterns of twelve men stationed along the route.

Apperley later wrote down what was told to him by one of the guests at the party.

"The first obstacle was the sunk fence, into which, as may be expected, he was landed; but the opposite side being on a gradual slope, from top to bottom, the carriage and its extraordinary inmate were drawn out without receiving injury. Nowise disconcerted, he sent his team at the next fence—the wide drain—and such was the pace he went at, that it was cleared by a yard or more; but the jerk pitched Myton on to the wheeler's back; but by crawling over the dashing leather he regained his seat, and got the horses back again in the proper direction, and taking the two remaining fences in gallant style, got safe into the turnpike road and pocketed the cash."

This sounds like a fairy tale, and a cruel one, and one's sympathies instantly go out to the poor beasts thus misused in

the dead of night, but it was not quite so impossible and foolhardy a feat as it seemed.

Alken's illustration of the event shows John and a powerful pair of chestnut horses in the act of crossing the drain which, although wide, is not deep, and the hedges of those days when enclosure was fairly new were nothing like the thick, stout growths we are familiar with nowadays. John seems to be heading for a gap in a line of low, straggling bushes.

It is likely that the animals came through this ordeal with nothing worse than a few scratches, mitigating what seems on the face of it to be a senseless piece of bravado. Many years later a celebrated horse-dealer remarked, "I always look upon a man who drives a tandem as a fool; he makes two hosses do the work of one and most likely breaks his silly neck."

John was not a fool, and he avoided a fatal accident by abandoning his tandem as soon as he had tired of it. The aimless restless days followed one upon another when he was like a leaf blown before the wind. He still had another three years to go before he could come into his inheritance and the Lord Chancellor saw to it that he was unable to touch the capital; the time seemed to stretch ahead into eternity and he could think of no way to fill it except, perhaps, by joining the Army. He could buy himself a commission in a crack regiment and enjoy himself among other young men of his own class, away from the nagging responsibilities of squiredom, until he came of age.

But it was difficult to make the effort, and while he sat idly trying to make up his mind a terrible rumour came out of Europe.

"Napoleon has escaped!"

The island of Elba upon which Bonaparte had been confined was not secure enough to hold him; his spies convinced him that the French hated the Bourbons and he had only to arrive in France and the whole nation would rally to him.

Presently the rumour became certainty. Bonaparte was upon the mainland, and the Hundred Days had begun.

Louis XVIII fled before him. "The poor Bourbons have not, I'm afraid, behaved with the spirit and firmness such a moment

required," Lady Caroline Capel wrote, but Wellington told Creevey that he thought Bonaparte would be murdered in a few weeks by the unruly faction who were setting up a Republic in his name.

Wellington took over as Commander-in-Chief, and throughout the first week of June rumours abounded as the French army drew nearer to Brussels. A great battle was imminent, and by the evening of the seventeenth of June Wellington had withdrawn his forces to an undulating plateau which crossed the Brussels-Charleroi highway about a mile and a half south of the village of Waterloo.

Here the troops bedded down for the night. It was pouring with rain, and Sunday morning dawned without respite from the downpour. The men got up and managed to obtain some sort of hot breakfast; presently the sun came out and dried them off. As Wellington and his staff rode round the lines they looked, said Gronow, as gay and unconcerned as if they were hacking to a meet in England. The Duke was mounted on Copenhagen, the favourite who had carried him at Vittoria, and the troops grinned as they watched him go by. They did not love him, but maintained a dour respect for "Old Nosey" who had led them half across Europe to this remote Belgian village.

There are various and conflicting reports of the battle. Wellington himself remarked that he had read so many of them that he would soon believe that he was not there at all, but there was no doubt about the final outcome. The Allied armies were completely victorious, but they paid a terrible price. When the Duke read the preliminary casualty lists he broke down and wept, but perhaps the most pathetic reminders of man's cruelty were the wretched shattered horses who lay out all night in their blood and pain until the farriers came at dawn with a merciful death.

In London the Regent wept also when Major Percy stepped forward with news of the victory, laying the captured French eagles at the Prince's feet. His emotions were not tinged with mercy; he had great satisfaction in refusing Bonaparte's plea for

asylum and committing him to the rocky inhospitable island of St Helena in the South Atlantic. Here, for the rest of his life, the great General was confined, his country's aggressive military power broken for ever, and the English squires looked forward to resuming their comfortable, orderly lives, but presently they began to realise that all was not as it had been.

The Luddite riots of 1811 had revealed an uglier side of the easy-going, reliable British artisan, and in 1815, when the threat of France had been removed, shrill voices were urging the Government to attend to matters nearer home.

Even peaceful Shrewsbury had its dissidents, miners from Wales, itinerant workers from the brass foundries of the Black Country, nailers from Stafford, who added their complaints to the rising volume of discontent and unrest, and sometimes the Squire of Halston could be seen in this very mixed company, handing out sovereigns to all and sundry.

The County did not approve, but John had never cared much for other people's opinions, and their criticism of his open-handedness was ignored. They considered that he spoiled his servants, and that it was unnecessary to keep fifty labourers on his pay-roll for the sole purpose of attending to his game copses. The amount of money he was beginning to spend on sport was presently to account for much of the drain on his income; he ran up a bill of fifteen hundred pounds with a London dealer for live pheasants and foxes to stock his domains, and Apperley tells us that it was impossible to guess at his annual expenses in post-horses, "but every postboy in England lamented the fall of Squire Mytton, their very best customer".

He got through half a million during his lifetime, a sum worth infinitely more then than it is today, but his profligacy was never questioned by the working people who loved him devotedly, so much so, said Apperley, "that I do not think a bailiff in the four surrounding counties would have arrested him, had he been instructed to do so".

John's generosity to those less fortunate than himself was a genuine expression of sympathy for a situation which he believed

to be unalterable. No one could imagine a time when measures would be taken to relieve poverty at source, and in those days charity was a duty solemnly undertaken by the great houses, each with its own traditions going back many generations.

Halston undertook to provide bread and grain each week for the poor, and those who received this dole did not feel themselves to be under any obligation. The Squire had inherited the right to give charity as the poor had to accept it, but gradually, as the pattern of life became distorted and the old values changed, this charity became for many people, another symbol of privilege within an outmoded class system.

But John's expansive gestures never seemed to cause offence even to the touchiest Radical; we are told that "there was a good-humoured and affectionate simplicity about him that rendered him a great favourite in the neighbourhood," but this cheerful trusting nature, combined with serious lack of judgement where his fellow creatures were concerned, left him wide open to the swindler and the bilker. The accounts were paid without being checked, and while this increased his standing with the tradespeople it led, later on, to the accumulation of massive debts. Yet even as the writs were being passed on to the solicitors, his agents had instructions to issue the daily dole to all the riff-raff who collected at the gates of Halston.

John's second life was the curious seedy half-world of the racecourse hangers-on, the sweepings of stable and kennel and the tough harlots of the Midlands pubs. This craving for low society was by no means unusual among the well-to-do, but there were not many who enjoyed themselves with such delight as John did. Of course he loved being praised and flattered, and showing off his great strength; "The biceps muscle of his arm was larger than that of Jackson's, the celebrated pugilist"; he was regarded as the fountain of wisdom, particularly in horsy matters. Among such people he was a king, the object of all eyes.

Mrs Mytton and Mr Owen looked on and said nothing. The clergyman had always realised the hopelessness of turning John aside from his chosen path, yet he believed that the young man

would instinctively follow the pattern laid down by his forefathers.

John's mother often wished that her son would conform more readily to County ways; he was intelligent, well read in Classical authors, could speak French; it would be pleasant, she thought, if he would converse with the other gentlemen in the neighbourhood about art, and architecture, and landscape gardening, for these things were becoming fashionable even among country squires now that the Prince Regent had given the lead.

But John thought the latter a booby, especially since it had become known that he had spent a considerable sum of money in acquiring the Baring collection of Dutch paintings, and on pictures and ornaments for his Marine Pavilion at Brighton. It seemed unmanly and disreputable to show an interest in interior decoration, and many country gentlemen who would praise the beauty of a hunter had no interest in art either as a commodity or an investment.

The Mytton family possessed a small, good collection of pictures which John immediately sold as soon as times grew hard. He was evidently quite aware of their value since he refused a thousand guineas for one of them, but he had no eye for their aesthetic qualities. Sporting prints were more to his taste, and he consented to sit for his portrait upon a chestnut hunter, in full regalia of silk hat, scarlet cutaway coat and top-boots, with his hounds patiently gathered around the horse's feet.

He was now hunting over his own estates with a rag-taggle pack and more by instinct than judgement. When summer turned to autumn and filled the copses with drifting leaves while the bracken gilded and the hazelnuts ripened, the young hounds came loping along the rides and an old dog fox lay close and cunning. It was not him they sought but the silly cubs who knew no better than to break cover and carry the whole uncouth, baying pack through the woods until the echoes faded and died.

But when the young entry had had their turn the older, more reliable hounds would take the field and that was the best sport of all, for there was no lack of brave men to follow where they led.

Many of the officers returned from the wars had taken to

wearing their scarlet uniform coats in the hunting field, and this fashion has remained to the present day. It suited John, and he wore his hunting pink as flamboyantly as any prince, but he never really cared about clothes although he spent prodigally upon them. "There were at one time," says Apperley, "a hundred and fifty-two pairs of breeches and trousers in his wardrobe, with a proportionate accompaniment of coats, waistcoats, etc." His shoes and boots were all made in London, and so light that they were quickly worn out during his headlong progress through the countryside; he never felt the cold and disdained any kind of protective clothing, and his body and hands were always warm. Thus he took risks which would have floored a lesser man, plunging into freezing rivers, lying prone on the ice to shoot duck, and continuing to hunt all day after a wetting which soaked his thin clothes through and through.

He had grown to his full strength and vigour during that summer of 1815 when he realised, with regret, that his chance of military prowess had vanished with the defeat of Bonaparte. Nevertheless, army life had its compensations even without war and the hazard of being killed, however gloriously, and John wavered, dallied, and could not make up his mind one way or the other. His mother and his ex-tutor were by now convinced that a change of scene was not only desirable but necessary, for some of the company that John was keeping was most unsuitable; what was even worse he did not care in the least who knew of it.



CHAPTER FIVE



'Lady Dashington's Bonnet Stops the Way'

WATERLOO marked the beginning of the end of the squires' rule. The year 1815 saw a disastrous fall in the price of wheat to 66s a quarter, and everywhere agricultural economy collapsed. Those who had committed themselves in the good years now found that they were bankrupt, with no means of paying off their creditors other than selling their only asset—land. So, gradually, over the years the estates were broken up, family ties snapped and old loyalties forgotten. Bewildered in a changing world to which they could not adapt themselves, the squires clung to their old powers until they were engulfed in the vast tide of new social ideas and reforms which swept on and left them high and dry, anachronisms in a society who had once been its backbone.

But for the ladies and gentlemen who daily paraded in Hyde

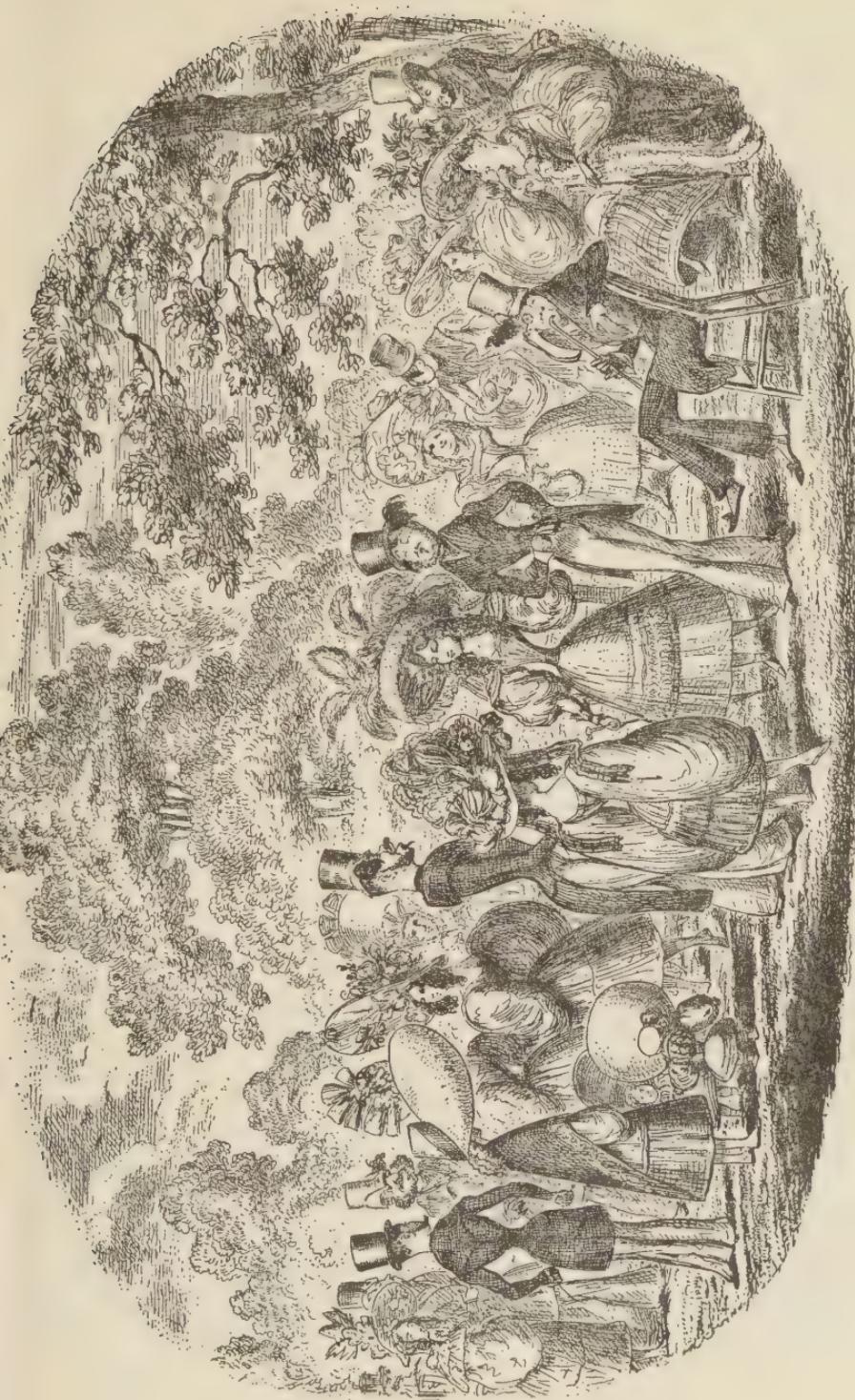
Park life went by in a whirl and glitter of balls, routs, assemblies and entertainments of all kinds. Gronow described the scene on a warm summer's evening when the golden dust rose about the horses' hooves and the great trees spread their graceful shade.

"The company which then congregated about five was composed of dandies and women in the best society, the men mounted on such horses as England alone could produce. The dandy's dress consisted of a blue coat with brass buttons, leather breeches, and top-boots; it was the fashion to wear a deep, stiff, white cravat. Many of the ladies used to drive into the Park in a carriage called a *vis-à-vis* which held only two persons. The hammercloth rich in heraldic design, the powdered footmen in smart liveries, and a coachman who assumed the gaiety and appearance of a wigged bishop, were indispensable."

Here too would ride Bryan Brummell, the impeccable Beau whose affairs would soon become unmanageable and force him to leave the country; the eccentric Earl of Morton who refused to dock his horses' tails, the Duke of Dorset on his white horse, the Marquis of Anglesey, and the Prince Regent himself, accompanied by Sir Benjamin Bloomfield. Many others who had come only to ogle and stare carried back the gossip and scandal to the clubs and drawing rooms; "Nor did you see," says Gronow, "any of the lower or middle classes of London intruding themselves in regions which . . . were then given up exclusively to persons of rank and fashion."

The ladies' dresses glimmered like pale flowers against the background of the trees, and all the gay bonnets fluttered with frills and ribbons; the susceptible hearts of these charming creatures palpitated at the sight of the Waterloo veterans who returned to lay up their tattered battle standards and begin a new life in their native towns and villages.

Perhaps it was envy of these war heroes that finally persuaded John to attach himself to the 7th Hussars and to purchase a commission in that regiment. Accordingly, on May 30th, 1816, he was gazetted Cornet Mytton, and went straightway to London where he was fitted for his uniform at the best tailor's he could



A scene in Kensington Gardens or Fashions and Frights of 1829 by George Cruikshank

find, and we may be sure that he cut a fine figure in the dolman, frogs and shako of a cavalry officer.

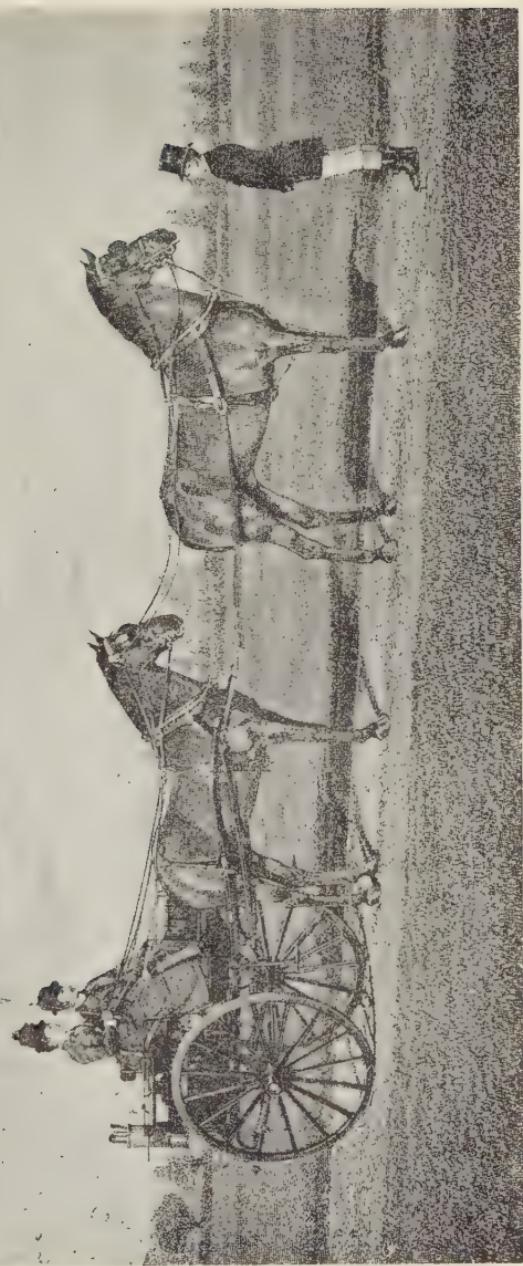
His mother and sister sobbed at the parting, as they had so often done in the past when he left for school. Now he was a young man of fortune setting out on a military career which might tide him over the weary months of waiting for complete possession of his vast estates, and from the mountains of luggage which accompanied him one might have thought that he was setting out for Tartary instead of St Omer, where his regiment was stationed as part of the Army of Occupation in France.

John took with him as valet his boyhood servant, Old John, who well knew his master's temperament and may occasionally have saved him from the consequences of his worst excesses; Mrs Mytton hoped that this faithful retainer would keep an eye on his master and try to prevent what she feared might be a repetition of his Paris days.

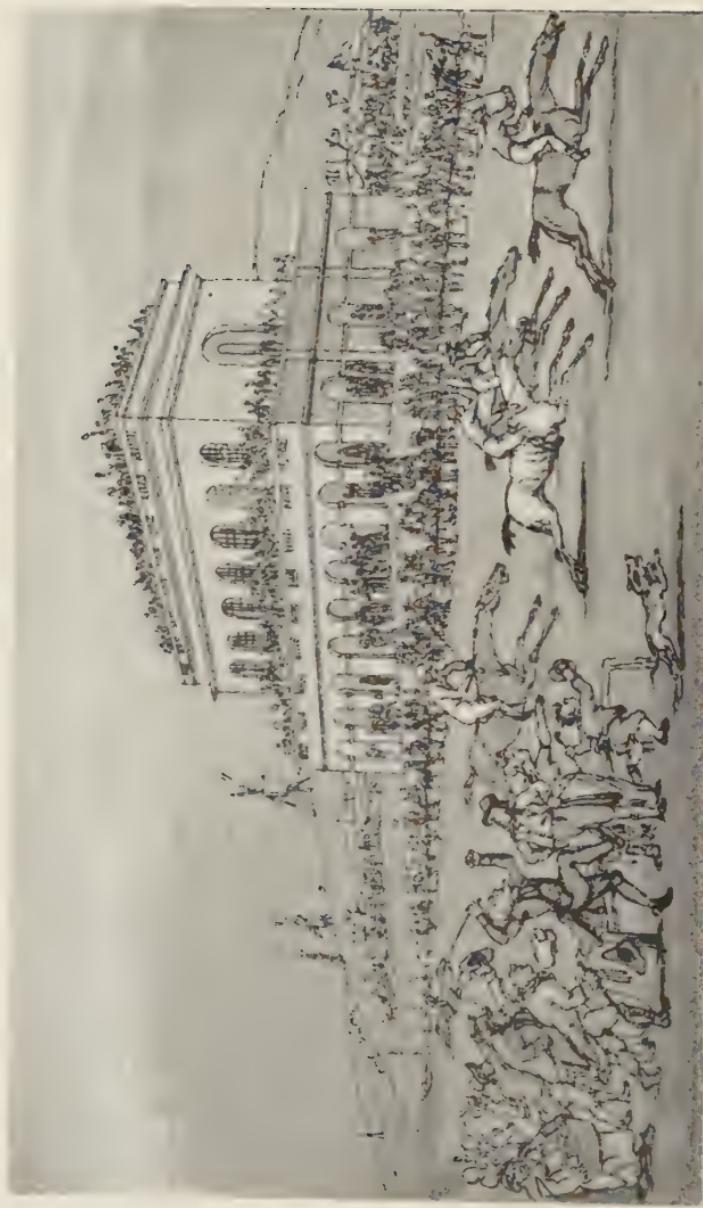
John departed, to report to regimental headquarters in the town of Guisnes. The 7th Hussars' C.O. at that time was none other than the redoubtable Marquis of Anglesey who, as Earl of Uxbridge, had been second in command to Wellington at Waterloo, and had lost a leg there. He was rewarded with the marquisate, thus satisfying his inclinations to vanity, but he was, nevertheless, a gallant and sincere man. We do not know what impression he received of John as he welcomed him to the regiment, but later on he may well have regretted the day he first clapped eyes on him.

A young man of nineteen, particularly if he had expectations, could enjoy himself greatly in military circles, and soon John was the leader of a group of lads of his own age and temperament. Their larking attracted the attention of their superior officers on many occasions, and once John was hauled up before his C.O. and forbidden to pay a gambling debt of six thousand napoleons to the captain of another regiment, who was suspected of cheating.

These youngsters needed excitement and were not likely to get it in the peacetime Army. They spent many of their off duty hours laying wagers, betting on race-horses and playing the tables;



A tandem



York Races by Thomas Rowlandson

after John had been posted to St Omer he borrowed three thousand pounds from a local banker against his inheritance and lost almost half of it in a gambling hell. He then proceeded to smash the place up declaring it to be crooked, which no doubt it was, but this was a matter for the French civil authorities and not for a young English Cornet of Horse. He got away with it, of course, as he always did. The affair became a regimental joke and put into the archives along with the other exploits of this charming, impossible young man.

The British Army in France was forbidden on pain of death to plunder, unlike the Russians and Prussians who considered it their right to take anything they fancied. However, the officers of the 7th Hussars would hardly have been human if they did not try to pick up bargains wherever they could, and there was no lack of sellers. John bought himself a one-eyed charger called Baronet, and his judgement served him well for not only did Baronet carry him successfully during his time in the Army, but, on his return to Shropshire, proved to be a capital hunter for nine seasons.

The Duke of Wellington and Colonel Sir Henry Smith, then doing duty as Mayor of Cambrai, had divided the former's command into two areas, one of which was to be hunted by the Duke's hounds, and the other by Sir Henry's and this meant that the young officers of the Hussars had plenty of sport within easy reach.

Steeple-chasing also was immensely popular. Originating in Ireland, it was in its earliest form merely a test of the stamina of both horse and rider. The contestants were required to cross a certain stretch of country in the shortest possible time, and they were allowed to take their own line provided they steered by certain chosen landmarks, church steeples among them. Gradually, however, as hunting itself became more organised, the sport associated with it took shape and assumed the form in which we know it today.

A match would be made by several gentlemen over an agreed course with controlling stewards to see fair play, and it was a

pastime which greatly suited the daredevils with money to burn or a horse to sell. As it grew in popularity the young bloods were always on the look-out for a good 'chaser whose value tended to increase as he grew older; a country occupation, it catered more for the sporting landowner and less for the townsman, but at Liverpool in 1836 the first attempt was made to introduce the sport to the public as entertainment.

A two-mile race course was laid out, and a grandstand built, and the first race was run on February 29th and won by Captain Becher. In 1839 the Grand National Steeplechase was inaugurated when the famous Lottery ridden by his equally famous jockey Jem Mason was first past the post.

The French peasants stared open-mouthed as the young cavalry officers hurled themselves across country upon their spirited horses, substituting a dangerous pastime for the excitement of battle. Sometimes the bets were enormous, but the British have always been great gamblers and seldom miss the opportunity for a wager. John had several of these transactions on hand and one was on the result of a contest between a dog and a badger.

He had been told that there was a singularly ferocious specimen out in the country which no terrier had been able to draw.

"I know one that could!" he declared, and after making sure that he stood to win a considerable amount he sent Old John back to England to the village of Cockshot in Shropshire where dwelt one Burrows and his bull-terrier.

"And if Burrows won't part with him," said John splendidly, "bring him over, dog and all, at his own price."

The terrier was purchased for the considerable sum of eight pounds, and taken back to France where he successfully tackled the badger and John won his wager.

By now the novelty of army life was beginning to wear off, in spite of the companionship, the gay routs and balls, and the splendid panoply of full dress uniform on parade. In a month or two John would be of age; he had incurred enormous expenses during his time in France and it was hinted to him that the authorities were considering asking him for his resignation. He

decided to quit, and as a parting gesture jumped Baronet over the mess-table which was laid up for dinner.

The next morning he left for home taking with him Baronet and an Irish-bred mare charmingly named Langolee, from whom he intended to breed racing stock. He left behind a legend, a fund of stories, and a handsome piece of plate for the mess, and even Lord Anglesey must have retained a liking for him for he later accepted an invitation to be present at his wedding.

Mrs Mytton received her son with mixed feelings. His extravagances abroad did not promise any hope that he had altered his ways and was prepared to settle down to his great responsibilities, and during his absence Rebecca had caused her endless worry by deciding suddenly to elope to Gretna Green with John Hesketh Lethbridge, the son of a Somersetshire squire.

Everything, thought poor Mrs Mytton, was turning out for the worst; even the weather was horrible. There were snowdrifts in April, cloudbursts and thunderstorms in July which drowned crops and animals, and it was so foggy and gloomy that Byron declared Lord Castlereagh must have taken over the Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

These dismal prospects had been enlivened by the spring marriage of the Regent's daughter Charlotte to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. It was a love-match, soon to end in tragedy, but it provided a stimulus to other young people in the throes of courtship. John was beginning to pay serious attention to a young Shropshire lady, the eldest daughter of the late Sir Tyrwhitt Jones of Stanley Hall. Harriet Emma was a charming, flowerlike creature, fond of gay society life and already accounted a beauty by the critical gossiping habitués of Almack's who knew her well at balls and assemblies. Feather-headed and lacking in character, she needed a husband who would cherish her, and protect her against the rude shocks of life. That she chose John was a fair example of the amazing chemical affinity of opposites, but their fusion ended in her death, and his despair.

To John, no doubt, Almack's meant the gaming club, but if his inclinations had led him to the Assembly Rooms, and to listen

to the gossip, he would have heard much to influence him against Harriet Emma. But they only met socially at the great houses of the County and then he was charmed by her daintiness and elegance although her conversation was mostly of clothes, parties, scandal and the London seasons.

The grosser masculine topics of hunting and shooting were not mentioned, for at that time ladies did not appear in the hunting field unless they were eccentric, like the Countess of Salisbury, or brazen, like Phoebe Higgs, the mistress of that extraordinary person Squire George Forester of Willey.

This gentleman was a neighbour of the Myttons when John was a child, hunting the country from the Clee Hills to the Wrekin, with the famous Tom Moody as whipper-in. He never married but kept his lady loves quite openly at Willey, choosing them as much for their equestrian skill as for their beauty, and insisting that they accompany him out hunting.

His parties were famous and lasted far into the night; he once took hounds out after dinner, found his fox and killed him by moonlight. Phoebe took bigger chances, and jumped more boldly, than either the Squire or Tom Moody, but she had the reputation of being a kind and generous woman, apparently content to remain the Squire's mistress. Evidently the pick of a splendid stable, and sufficient cash to live in comfort, outweighed the disadvantages.

In view of what eventually happened it was a thousand pities that John did not have the luck to find a woman like Phoebe, who would have married him and organised him into a sensible and ordered existence. As it was, he chose as his first wife an adoring, empty-headed clinging woman whose attempts to reform him were so unsuccessful that his second marriage was also to end in disaster.

"In my opinion, Lady Charlotte," said Apperley to John's second prospective mother-in-law, "Mr Mytton has no business with a wife at all, but should he marry your daughter Caroline, there is a greater prospect of his making a good husband to her, than to any other woman in the world."

Harriet Emma belonged to that world of high society which, after Waterloo, had become gayer, madder, more spendthrift than ever. The assemblies at Almack's were glittering with diamonds, rubies and gold lace, and every night of the season the cobbled streets of Mayfair were full of elegant carriages taking the ladies and gentlemen to their pleasures. There were splendid and gallant scenes; the magnificent masked balls beneath the crystal chandeliers of ducal palaces, the picnics on green lawns among the rosebeds when the ladies in their enchanting bonnets were waited upon by cavaliers in tight pantaloons and elegant ruffled stocks, the race meetings at which could be seen the most beautiful horses in the world.

John's taste for low life seemed for the time being to have been stifled by consideration for Harriet Emma's delicate feelings. Mrs Mytton and Mr Owen watched with surprise and delight as one by one his old ways were abandoned and he became the assiduous lover, adopting a respectable conformity and behaving in all things as a young man of property should.

The opportunity came for him to acquire a recognised pack of hounds from a neighbour of his, the eccentric Mr Cressett Pelham who hunted the Albrighton country. This gentleman had insisted on dressing his hunt servants in white coats with black collars, and black velvet breeches, and was himself so unpredictable that if hounds were running strongly he was quite likely to be galloping in the opposite direction. Having made his hunt servants such guys, Dick Christian remarked, he went out of his way to avoid them.

John now proposed to hunt five days a week, which he did with varying success; he covered a wide range of country and would often hack forty or fifty miles on relays of horses to get to the meet.

His three hunt servants, Robert Jones, Edward Bates and John Craggs, remained with him until 1821 when he gave up the pack, showing a remarkable sense of loyalty considering the terrific risks he took, but perhaps they had become too accustomed to the oddities of Mr Cressett Pelham.

Having committed himself to the expense of running three packs of hounds, John decided to found his racing establishment. Langolee had been brought over from France for the purpose of breeding young stock, but he was too impatient to wait three or four years for the results of her mating so he purchased a couple of nags called Hazard and Neck or Nothing. He entered all three for the Oswestry meeting in September, a week before his twenty-first birthday, under his own colours of green and white, with a black cap.

None of them was placed, and Neck or Nothing broke down altogether, but the young owner had experienced the excitement of seeing his own animals at the starting line, and the pleasurable companionship of racing men. He found them so delightful that he became, from that moment, one of the Turf's greatest devotees, and if he had possessed the patience to build up a really sound stud might have achieved lasting fame. He won many prizes during his racing career and owned some good horses, but he lost interest as soon as the novelty had worn off and left the breeding and much of the buying to others.

Harriet Emma was not interested in John's sporting activities and did not encourage him to pursue them. It was understood that he would soon ask for her hand, and when they were married she was determined to wean him away from the last vestiges of his undesirable life, and bring him into that glittering circle which she ornamented so charmingly.

She had not begun to realise his true character. John had no intention whatever of changing his ways to suit his wife's convenience; if she did not like what she found she might very well go elsewhere. It needed consummate tact, as Mr Owen knew, to make John accept even the most elementary conventions, and poor Harriet Emma was not well-equipped with that virtue. She chattered excitedly to her envious London friends of the vast fortune she would enjoy and the position in society she would occupy. She was sure that there would be a town house if she wished it, perhaps even a place at Court, for money unlocked many doors to the presence of the Prince Regent. The older

aristocracy had been obliged to overlook the vulgarity of many of his friends, and even Harriet Emma had to admit that the Prince's conduct both as a husband and a father left much to be desired. His wife had remained with him long enough to bear his daughter and had then parted from him. She was now junketing about on the Continent with some very queer characters, losing no opportunity to blacken her husband's name and living only for the day when she could come back and claim her rightful place as Queen of England.

People speculated how long the old King would last; gentle, pathetic, patriarchal in his long white beard he existed in a vacuum without sight, sound or intelligence. It was a far cry from the day when he had chased Fanny Burney down the garden path and frightened her half to death with his raving. Now, if he spoke at all, it was of the dead, and the feudal loyalty given to him by the squires was not extended to his son, who could not even keep his wife in order and was allowing her to be used by the Whigs in their unscrupulous political dealings.

Harriet Emma, dazzled by the prospects which she fondly imagined to lie before her, shut her eyes to the seamy side of Court life. John, happy and in love, promised her the moon without any intention of giving it to her once his joyful mood had worn off, and together these ill-matched lovers prepared to enjoy high summer among the green fields and hills of their lovely native county. On the surface there was little to disturb the complacent equanimity of the prosperous ruling families; there was abundant wealth which was continually increasing, the land was producing more and manufactured goods poured from the factory and workshop.

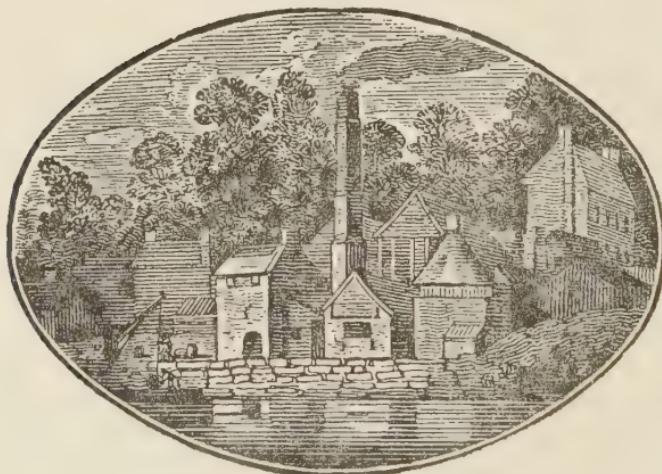
But although Britain was becoming richer than ever, the wealth was gradually changing hands, away from the gently born who had been trained in a rigorous school to accept their responsibilities, and the old notion of what constituted a gentleman was being overlaid by the hard, smart, competitive outlook of the newly rich.

This process has never been reversed or halted, and the next

hundred and fifty years saw the gradual decline of the old aristocracy and the acquisition of estates and positions in society by many who neither by inclination nor by training were fitted to hold them. Many of these new landowners became arrogant and overbearing in order to bolster up a flagging self-confidence, upsetting still further that delicate balance between master and man which had withstood the Revolution.

John, and others like him, were the last representatives of the rococo, the fantastic, the all embracing liberality of the Golden Age which had ended in France with the fall of the Bastille, and which was to end in Britain when science had obliterated these impractical squires.

The Industrial Revolution did not bring the Millennium, but the law of supply and demand, and all commodities, whether man or matter, were governed by it.



CHAPTER SIX



JOHN'S courtship of Harriet Emma was interrupted by the elaborate preparations for his coming of age. There had not been such a celebration at Halston since he was born, and Mrs Mytton exhausted herself attending to the myriad details for she could not rely on John for anything.

On the morning of September 30th, 1817, the bells began to peal in Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Copthorne, Whittington and St Martin's, cannons discharged in salute and presently John's tenants and the villagers on his estates joined in the procession behind the wagons bearing barrels of old ale and sheep and oxen for roasting. John himself had been out since early morning accepting the congratulations of the County and drinking toasts with his friends at all the local inns. It was said that the whole of Shropshire was wishing him and his family well on that day, and as he drove home with Sir Richard Puleston in time for the grand dinner and ball at Halston his right arm was numb from handshakes and his head dizzy with wine.

There were some seventy guests already in the house which was ablaze with lights from end to end. A splendid temporary portico "of magnificent appearance, brilliantly illuminated," had been put up at the entrance, and the road to Whittington was lined with lanterns and torches along all its length, glimmering on the varnished panels of the coaches as they sped towards Halston. At nine o'clock there was a firework display, and afterwards the whole company danced in the flower-decked ballroom until dawn. The drowsy coachmen whipped up their teams in the cold, misty early hours of the October morning, and John, without waiting for his valet, threw himself on his bed half-dressed and fell asleep almost immediately.

Thanks to his generosity in supplying beef and beer nearly the whole of Shrewsbury was able to join in the celebrations, and the tradesmen competed with each other to provide transparencies, coloured lanterns and decorated windows. Mr Hawley had set lights all round the top of his brewery and the initials "J.M." in variegated lamps, while Mr Acton the coachmaker had surrounded the arms of Mytton with wreaths of flowers and laurels. Local poets took the opportunity to display their talents, and came up with fervently expressed rhymed tributes.

Health to the Heir of Halston's far-famed line,
Long may his Hall with ancient splendour shine,
May manly virtues grace the Mytton's head,
And Honour's purest ray round his brow be shed.

John was delighted with all these marks of affection and goodwill, and responded to them characteristically by promising to conduct himself more decorously in future. One of the first things he had done on attaining his majority was to make Mr Owen his chaplain, so ensuring the clergyman's livelihood and confirming his privileged position. The latter would very much have liked to discuss John's matrimonial prospects with him, advising him through his own practical common sense. But he knew that nothing he said was likely to be permanently effective.

"What the devil is the use of having a head on my shoulders if I am obliged to make use of yours?" John retorted, and if it had been suggested that he was the last person who ought to marry Harriet Emma he would have laughed in their faces.

Mr Owen loved the young man and wanted only to see him comfortably settled down and respected in the neighbourhood. Once, after a particularly wild party at Halston when John lay stretched out insensible on the sofa, the chaplain said sadly, "Only think what the Squire with his abilities might have been, and only see what he is!"

Harriet Emma had no such reservations. John had overwhelmed her and, like a moth drawn into a brilliant flame, doomed her to destruction by an element she could neither control nor understand. Her family had encouraged her to accept his suit and the mothers of other eligible daughters accepted their defeat and retired, soothing their injured feelings with the thought that Jack Mytton was a wastrel and a drunkard. But the young ladies of the County envied Harriet Emma from the bottom of their hearts as the Squire was the gayest bachelor in Shropshire.

Mrs Mytton, however, had grave misgivings each time she saw the frail, delicate girl, already in the first stages of tuberculosis though no one realised it. Whether she would be strong enough to bear John's children was another matter, and presently something happened which increased Mrs Mytton's forebodings.

The bells of Shrewsbury had scarcely ended their merry pealing for John than they were solemnly tolling for a royal death.

In November Princess Charlotte died on giving birth to a stillborn son. During that dreadful night all the Regent's hopes for the future had foundered, and people forgot their antipathy to the Hanoverians as they grieved with him for his loss.

If a robust young princess can die in childbed, thought Mrs Mytton, how will it be with my prospective daughter-in-law? But she said nothing of her fears to John, who was just beginning to enjoy the pleasures of being a rich man. He had hundreds of friends, it seemed, who all loved him or said they did; he did not notice that many of them were very eager to help him spend

his money, and he bought horses, dogs, clothes and whatever took his fancy. He larked about and played practical jokes and behaved like an overgrown schoolboy, conveniently forgetting his earlier promises of good behaviour, but his fooling was never malicious and was carried out with disarming simplicity.

The horse-dealer Clarke had delivered a consignment of carriage horses to the squire's stable when John gave orders for two of them to be harnessed to the gig tandem fashion. He invited Clarke to sit up beside him, and asked whether he thought that the leader would jump timber.

"I don't know," said Clarke.

"Then we'll try him!" John cried, and before anyone could stop him had headed straight for a closed gate. The horse, feeling the whip and being given his head, cleared it easily, leaving the gig and the other animal behind. Clarke slid down white and trembling, almost too overcome to ask for his money, but his experience was less alarming than that undergone by another friend of John's who went out driving with him.

Terrified at the breakneck pace, he begged John to go more slowly.

"**Were** you ever hurt, then, by being upset in a gig?" the Squire asked.

"No, thank God, for I was never upset in one."

"What a damned dull fellow you must have been all your life!"

And he ran the near wheel up a bank, the vehicle turned over and pitched the pair of them out on to the road. Neither of them was much injured except for a few bruises, but it is not known whether they remained on speaking terms with one another afterwards.

One of John's achievements was to train a horse to rear up in the shafts, although he had sense enough only to perform this feat when he was alone in the gig. Harriet Emma was terrified to go driving with him, and indeed after they were married there was an accident and she broke her arm. After that nothing would induce her to step into a vehicle with him unless the coachman was holding the reins.

Their wedding had been arranged for May, and was to take place in London. The hunting season would have closed by then, which left plenty of time for the tailors, sempstresses and mantua-makers to satisfy their clients for this important event in the social calendar, which was also to be enriched by three royal marriages.

The death of Princess Charlotte had left the Throne without an Heir Apparent and there seemed little likelihood that the Regent would be reconciled with his wife. His brothers began seriously to consider their own positions; York was childless, Kent, Cambridge and Clarence were unmarried, though Clarence had a vast illegitimate brood by the actress Dorothy Jordan. Kent, in fact, confided his thoughts on the matter to Creevey in December, remarking that if the Duke of Clarence would not make a move towards matrimony he would have to take some measures on the subject himself.

He chose the widowed Princess of Leiningen, sister to Leopold of Saxe Coburg; Cambridge became engaged to the Princess of Hesse Cassel, while Clarence, after proposing to several wealthy ladies who all turned him down, finally received the young woman his mother had chosen for him, shy, retiring Adelaide of Saxe Meiningen. Parliament grudgingly increased the allowances to the royal bridegrooms, and the Duke of Wellington did not hesitate to give his usual forthright opinion.

“My God, they are the damnedest millstones about the neck of any Government that can be imagined.”

Their scandalous private lives had lost them the nation’s respect; licentiousness was frowned upon by the new rising middle class, much of it nonconformist and sometimes puritan in outlook, the heirs of those proud religious zealots who had brought the King down nearly two hundred years ago. But the standards of behaviour set by the “ton” had seldom applied to the squires, who cherished their own code of conduct especially to those less fortunate than themselves, and although some were rash and gay like John himself it was not possible to imagine them behaving as the young drunken bucks did in Brighton when the Regent

held his Court there. They would ride through the streets knocking down old people, upsetting the trays of the blind beggars, beating up the disabled and breaking windows.

John always confined his practical jokes to those well able to bear them. George Underhill the horse-dealer once pressed him for payment of a debt, and upon receiving a note of hand sealed with John's own signet took it to the bank for honouring. But the banker happened also to be one of the Governors of the local madhouse, and what John had written in the note read, "Sir, Admit the bearer George Underhill, into the Lunatic Asylum. Your obedient servant, John Mytton."

He went to considerable lengths to achieve the desired effect, often putting himself to considerable inconvenience for a few moments' frolic. Once, when he had a doctor and a parson spending the evening with him, he disguised himself as a highwayman and by taking a short cut met them on the road as they were going home. Firing off a brace of pistols loaded with blanks he called upon them to stand and deliver. Terrified, the pair galloped away down the Oswestry road with John after them, and he declared that neither had ever ridden so fast in their lives.

He took fearful risks, riding Baronet over impossible fences and jumping wide, swift-flowing rivers; even the thought of his impending marriage did not deter him. His neighbours were first horrified then amused at his escapades, perhaps in their hearts they envied him, the essence of all the raffishness they would secretly have liked to display themselves. His good looks, his romantic gaiety and rashness, his lurid adventures, filled Harriet Emma's heart with love and excitement, and she dreamed of the perfect life ahead of her and the two of them growing old together at Halston with their children and grandchildren about them. But the County speculated on the probable duration of this unsuitable match in which the financial interests of the Jones family seemed to have outweighed any prospect of the bride's happiness.

There is no doubt that John was genuinely in love with her, but unfortunately he was incapable of sustaining these deeper

feelings for long. It only needed some trivial distraction to divert him and he had forgotten all his good intentions. Mrs Mytton went quietly about her preparations for the day when John would bring his wife home; she was looking forward to her help and companionship for since Rebecca had gone the task of administering Halston had become increasingly burdensome. It would be delightful, too, to bring back the old tradition of hospitality which had existed when her husband was alive, so that there would once again be balls and dinner parties on the grand scale.

Perhaps marriage would change John, and certainly he had shown much consideration for Harriet Emma during the months of courtship. But she knew that Mr Owen was uneasy and it increased the misgivings which she tried so hard to stifle. It was too late now to alter the situation when the troths had been plighted and the dowry settled and everything set in order for the union of these two old Shropshire families. John's great inheritance must be made secure as soon as possible for the times were uncertain and the squires were beginning to sense the undercurrents of unrest that were moving into their domains from the cities.

Plans for reform of Parliament were being drawn up by earnest thinkers all over the country; a monster petition was taken to the House of Lords bearing half a million signatures, and among other things it stated the need for universal suffrage and annually elected Parliaments. While this was being done the Regent was driving down Whitehall. On his return he was shot at.

His broken carriage windows became symbolic. Whig and Tory united against the Radicals and dissenters who, it was reported, were already organising rebellion and armed violence. The Government suspended habeas corpus, enrolled special constables and made many arrests; gradually the troubles subsided, but the reformers did not cease their activities.

“That cursed business of reform of Parliament is always in one's way,” Lord Holland wrote to Creevey, and now that the matter had been brought into the open it caused more argument and dissension than any other topic except Nonconformity. It was

not so much a political issue as a personal one; men took sides as they would over the best method of training a hunter and there was much outspokenness. John took little notice of these problems for he had other matters to think about, yet they were to have a direct bearing on his future. Thirteen years later, when things were very bad with him, he endeavoured to regain lost favour by standing for Parliament, unsuccessfully as it turned out, on a Reform ticket.

But in May, 1818, he waited for his wedding day untroubled by any fears for what lay ahead. A miniature of him painted about this time shows a handsome young man dressed in the fashionable coat and high stock of the period; perhaps the artist had flattered his subject for there is no sign of dissipation upon that smooth, unwrinkled face, the clear eyes gaze straight ahead and the expression shows serene contentment.

Perhaps his love for Harriet Emma had created an inner calm, and certainly for the time being he had ceased to drink heavily; he had never looked better as he stood with her at the altar and the sun shone on them as they left the church for the wedding breakfast.

The ceremony was performed by the Prebend of Westminster at St George's, Hanover Square, and John was attended by the Earl of Denbigh, Sir Edward Kerrison, Sir Watkyn Williams Wynn, and by his old Colonel Lord Uxbridge.

Lady Frances Williams Wynn later wrote in her diary, "Watkyn was yesterday assisting with many others at Mr M's wedding which he says in every respect was the grandest he ever has seen and was attended by a first-rate list of fashionables, Lords Denbigh, Uxbridge, Stanhope and Cholmondeley and many others to the number of about forty. The Duke of Marlborough arrived for the Breakfast which was given at Lady Jones', under the direction of Gunter's who furnished it largely with Grapes, Strawberries and other delicacies, in and out of season. The happy pair went off to keep their noces at Blenheim to which an express was sent down the day before to have it all in the highest order for them. . . . It is certainly flattering to the young man that so

many of his Brother Officers and his Colonel among others should have shown him such a mark of respect and one is willing to hope that it looks as if there was some good seed at the bottom of the Chaff which has hitherto floated about him."

It was not the custom in those days to spend the honeymoon alone. The Myttons went down to Blenheim surrounded by friends and relations; the groom, fortified by several hours' steady drinking, was not in a position to respect Harriet Emma's finer feelings and she may then dimly have realised the sort of life she would henceforth be leading. Their marriage, of course, had been doomed before it started, but John behaved reasonably until the novelty of having a wife had worn off. He took her back to Halston and she was enchanted, never happier than when she was wandering about the park or exploring the sunlit, mellow mansion. Mrs Mytton senior retired to make way for her namesake and the two women became close friends as time went on, reaching out to the other in mutual sympathy, for presently Harriet Emma's quiet gentility, clinging love and foolish chatter began to nauseate John and he felt stifled in her company.

So he left it, and went back to the stable-boys, jockeys and horse-copers in the Shrewsbury inns where he could feel and talk like a man, and the sharp-tongued tavern girls gave as good as they got. All his life he had been surrounded by women who needed his devotion and selfless love. He despised them, and the edgy boredom that was driving him back to drink brought also a resumption of those amorous adventures which had so distressed his friends.

Harriet Emma wept. It was not at all the kind of life she had imagined; there were no balls, assemblies or card-parties, and such company as she kept at Halston was of her husband's choosing and most uncongenial. Instead of showing a gentle regard for her wishes he was brash, rude, and at times downright unsupportable, while his practical jokes were beyond bearing.

He had taken her to visit the hounds in kennels, and had somehow contrived to shut her in with them so that their muddy paws and lolling tongues had made havoc of her gown and

complexion. Her screams had only encouraged John to louder whoops of laughter.

When at last he released her, sobbing and dishevelled, she stormed off to complain bitterly to her mother-in-law. The story reached the outside world; presently garbled versions were current in all the great houses until it seemed that John had set the hounds on his wife and hunted her all over Halston.

What a brute! exclaimed the ladies, and when the rumour went round that he had tried to drown her in the lake, indignation knew no bounds.

He must be mad! they all cried, and the scandalous gossip grew and was magnified, yet Harriet Emma had been at no time in danger of drowning. Seeing her trip along the shores of the lake in her thin slippers, John had picked her up bodily and stood her in the shallow water up to her ankles. These practical jokes must, of course, have been thoroughly boring to anyone not blessed with the slightest shred of humour, and one wonders what Phoebe Higgs would have made of them. Nevertheless there were moments which made up for all these discomforts, and the summer and autumn passed by pleasantly enough one way and another, until Harriet Emma shyly indicated that she was pregnant.

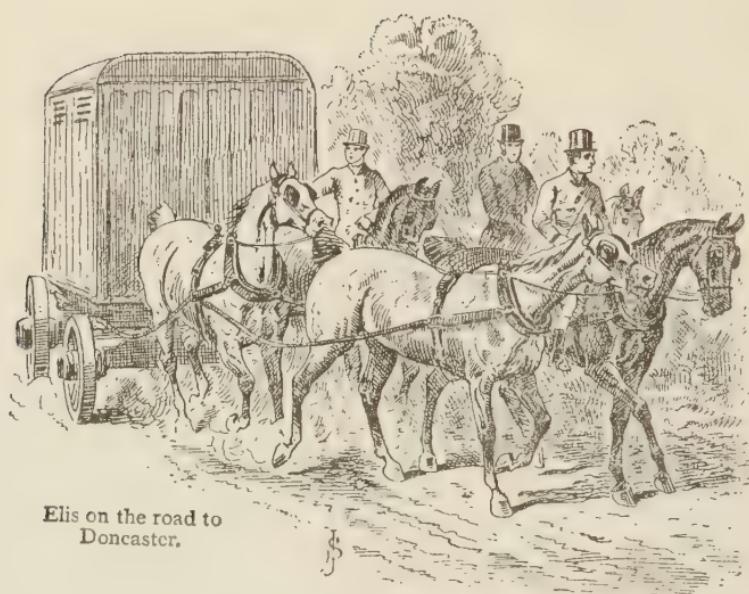
Then, for a month or two, the pair were reconciled, the practical jokes ceased, but winter was approaching and the great house grew damp and cheerless as the mists and fogs enshrouded it. Harriet Emma developed an ominous cough and Lady Williams Wynn wrote in December, "The young Mytton marriage sets out as expected, but unpromisingly. He is living with unbounded expense in the midst of every low Company which leaves her to perfect solitude. The change to her is almost too great for one to hope that it can do well, more especially as there is no prospect at present of her having a plaything and indeed she is said to be in very bad health."

This inaccurate statement was a fair example of County gossip and before the end of the year John had returned to his former companions, indifferent and disillusioned. Harriet Emma and

Mrs Mytton turned in their distress to Mr Owen, but, like them, he was powerless to interfere. John refused to listen to entreaties or threats; the money ran through his fingers like water and those about him noticed that he called for brandy more often than he called for wine.



CHAPTER SEVEN



Elis on the road to
Doncaster.

LANGOLEE had won a match against Mr Jones's Kill Devil at Shrewsbury in September, and John had three other horses in training which ran unsuccessfully at Oswestry and Wrexham. In 1819 he increased his string to eight but never won a race, and so his fortunes varied from year to year for although he had some good blood in his stables he would never wait for a horse to be properly made; he picked up a number of trophies at local race-meetings and competed at Nottingham, Chester and Manchester, but he was never able to cover his expenses. William Dunn, his trainer and jockey, was an honest, steady man who was able to prevent his master putting many extravagant plans into action, and if he had lived the Halston establishment might

have become as famous in the Midlands as that of Sir Tatton Sykes in the North. But Dunn was killed by a fall at Chester and John was unable to replace him; after his death the stables ceased to have much economic value and although many thoroughbreds set out with their attendants to walk to the racecourses they seldom came back with the cost of their keep.

These voyages on foot were anxious affairs for the trainers and grooms. They had to watch carefully the safety and well-being of their valuable charges and it says much for the integrity of the stable-boys that there were comparatively few cases of "nobbling" on the road. In August, 1812, Dan Dawson of Newmarket was executed for poisoning thirteen horses by putting arsenic in their drinking water. The wretched man had been after two horses who were running in the July Stakes, but he had slipped his poison into the wrong trough; of the thirteen which had been affected two died in great agony. Yet this sort of thing was surprisingly rare.

There was no other way of conveying race-horses to their destination except by walking them there, and it was not until 1836 that Lord George Bentinck, seeking to lengthen the odds against a horse called Elis, discovered an ingenious method of doing so. He waited until the punters had decided that the animal could not possibly reach Doncaster in time for the meeting, took up odds of ten thousand to one thousand against, then had Elis conveyed there in a specially constructed truck drawn by relays of post-horses. With the coming of the railways, transport was considerably simplified, and owners could box their horses to the nearest point.

The Turf had grown into a major industry since the days of Charles the Second, and, like hunting, it supported a great number of people. The formation of the Jockey Club in 1750 had done a great deal to improve the sport by instituting rules and removing abuses, nevertheless there were many pitfalls and hazards for the novice. Even the Regent, as Prince of Wales, had been involved in a scandal at Newmarket when, in 1791, the Royal jockey had been accused of pulling his mount Escape.

Sam Chifney protested his innocence, and the Prince, to his great credit, stood by him and removed his patronage from the course. Nor did he ever return, in spite of the entreaties of the Jockey Club, reserving his favours for Ascot, and for Brighton which was his favourite. He was often to be seen there on warm summer afternoons, surrounded by his friends after they had driven up from the Pavilion, trying to recoup some of the enormous losses he sustained annually.

He had a good eye for a horse and often picked them himself, although he usually paid far too much for them. At the end of his life he gave the exceptional sum of four thousand pounds for The Colonel with the express purpose of winning the Ascot Cup, but he was beaten by Lord Chesterfield's Zinganee.

The five "Classic" races—the Derby, Oaks, St Leger, Two Thousand and One Thousand Guineas—were bringing together top quality horses whose owners and trainers were becoming increasingly aware of the prestige value of these contests; the public were no less interested when fair play between riders ensured an exciting spectacle and well-found sport. Prince Pückler Muskau, visiting Newmarket in 1826, was impressed by the efficiency with which the races were run, and by the quality of the riding which compared favourably with anything he had seen on the Continent.

"It is a very skilful piece of policy and jockeyship of the riders here, to betray the real speed of their horses as little as possible and to display only as much of it as is necessary to win the race."

Sam Chifney was an expert in this, and the "Chifney rush" had caught many rivals napping, but in spite of the skill and daring they brought to a dangerous profession, jockeys lived perilously near the debtors' prison and the poorhouse. Sweated down to skin and sinew like the horses they rode, they were at the mercy of their employers even if they were like Sam Chifney the younger, who had once sat upon the knee of the Prince of Wales and received a golden guinea from the Royal hands.

Regular and organised race-meetings enabled owners to put their horses to well-balanced matches, intelligently ridden and

attractive to watch, and some of the Hunts ran their own clubs at the racing centres where a day on the course could be followed by a convivial evening. The Holywell Hunt had its headquarters at Doncaster, and John was often to be seen there with a brace of greyhounds at his heels, as well as at the Tarporley Hunt's new course in Delamere Forest; before he became too heavy he rode his own horses, but although he did not mind losing he hated his friends to win. Apperley relates how John headed him off during one contest and cost them both the stake, because he felt that the former's mount was better than his own.

It was sometime in 1819 that he first met Charles James Apperley, a cousin of Mr Owen, and rather down on his luck since expensive tastes and a modest income were incompatible. He was charming, an expert horseman and a great snob, moving from county to county in search of the best hunting, and eking out a living by horse-dealing. He was now resident in Shropshire, regretting the Midlands and the Quorn which he had known in the heyday of the magnificent Lord Sefton, as well as during the Mastership of Assheton Smith, but making do nevertheless, since his finances would not permit him otherwise, with the local packs in the neighbourhood.

Apperley was an attractive person and very good company, but he never succeeded in winning over young Mrs Mytton. She heartily disapproved of the way he flattered and encouraged her husband, anxious as she was to reform him, and Apperley was so piqued by her hostility that he remarked, "The first Mrs Mytton conducted herself with coldness towards her husband's old friends and companions, the sons of the native gentry of his neighbourhood, in every respect her equal."

Harriet Emma may well have been dismayed at some of the company her husband kept, for he was beginning to go downhill and show an addiction to alcohol which was presently to become compulsive. Doctors nowadays are unwilling to say precisely when heavy drinking becomes alcoholism; certainly in John's day the strains and stresses were absent which now encourage the disease, but self-indulgence and boredom had very much the same effect.

Young Mrs Mytton, then, had to stand by and watch Apperley uncork the extra bottles which put her husband into a drunken stupor, but it must be said in fairness to him that although he seemed to push his luck too far at Halston, several times quarrelling with John, he did as much as any friend could have done at the end when he cared for the stricken, abandoned creature with whom he had dined and gambled in happier days. After his first meeting with John he hunted several times with the Albrighton, amused by the sport offered by its eccentric Master, and grateful for the hospitality extended to him at Halston. John was fascinated by the older man whose life had deviated considerably from the scholarly path his father had mapped out for him. Apperley's passion was for hunting and he had been allowed to ". . . follow foxhounds in a red coat and cap, like puss in boots, before I was twelve years old". He joined the Army in 1798, but after his marriage to a cousin of Sir Watkyn Williams Wynn he left it and settled in Leicestershire where he was able to go out with the Quorn and indulge his fancy for the company of titled persons; but his finances were always shaky and he was obliged to move away from such an expensive region into the comparative obscurity of the North Midlands.

He seems to have taken to John in the same way as Sir Richard Puleston and Walter Giffard did, as a sportsman and a lively companion with whom it was a pleasure to share experiences; it is not certain whether there were ever any money transactions between them but Apperley never ceased to wonder at the way in which John spent his inheritance. "I am afraid to say," he remarks, "what was supposed to have been the amount of the bank-notes that were one day blown out of his carriage on his road from Doncaster races, but I have reason to believe it was several thousand pounds! . . . Like Democritus, however, Mytton laughed at everything and always spoke of this as a very good joke. I have seen him, when he had been going on a journey, take a lot of bank-notes out of his desk, and rolling them into a lump, throw them at his servant's head, as if they had been waste paper. . . . I picked up one of these lumps some years since in the

plantations of Halston containing £37, which had been there some days by its appearance; and as he never had pockets in his breeches, such occurrences must have been frequent."

Apperley found that horse-dealing in Shropshire was less profitable than he had imagined; after a while he drifted south to London with the intention of writing a sporting book, and John did not see him again for some time.

There were other companions with whom he could drink and ride, and unless the weather beat him he was out all day with them hunting or shooting. Harriet Emma, near her time, was glad of his absence. Like many partially deaf people he raised his voice when he spoke, he was noisy and clumsy, he would storm into her boudoir and toss her lap-dog high into the air indifferent to its yelping and her anguished cries. Harriet Emma's jangled nerves, and her indifferent health, made her sensitive to all this clatter and she would often cry when he approached her. The overheated salons of Almack's, the gay quadrilles and the gossip, all seemed immeasurably far away, and when she remembered those days nearly a year ago it was like looking back into another life.

Her trousseau hung in the wardrobes unused, the fans, the feathers, the gloves, the satin slippers remained in their silk wrappings and she hardly dared look in the mirror and see the thin, wan face staring back at her. She sat about moping and made no attempt to throw off her apathy and inertia. The baby was due in April and although she seemed to take an interest in the preparation for the layette and the nursery her mind was far away.

Not long for this world! Old Mrs Mytton was unable to dismiss her uneasy thoughts and her anxiety was shared by the whole household. Only the master was unaware of it; his ailing wife had ceased to have any attraction for him and his sole interest was in the child she was carrying. If his heir was born safely and survived he need have no fear for the future of his estates, yet some of his more serious-minded acquaintances had half-frightened him with tales of secret revolutionary plans made by

luddites and radicals. The fear of Jacobinism was still very much alive, and those squires who were regular visitors to London brought back hair-raising stories of plots discovered and caches of arms revealed. Most of them were untrue, but the seething unrest and discontent that existed among the poor and oppressed were real enough.

The trade boom of 1818 had been followed inevitably by a slump, and the familiar cycle of an overloaded market, reduced wages and diminishing purchasing power created panic among those responsible for administration. They could not understand these phenomena, or why they should have come without warning, and they were helpless before the poverty and despair of the working population.

The wounds of a divided society deepened. A great gulf existed between rich and poor and it could not be bridged by charity, however well-meaning, and the efforts of many Christian people were met with furious resentment. Bowls of soup and pious texts were useless to men who desperately wanted a chance to work and earn sufficient wages to feed and clothe their families. Some took to drink, for gin was cheap, effective and deadly; whole families became addicted and lay semi-unconscious in their rat-infested houses.

Many countryfolk were starving too in the areas where the Enclosure Acts were most effective, but injustice here seemed less harsh and inhuman where the air was fresh and sweet and a man could forget his poverty for a while in contemplation of the woods and fields of his own county. The Game Laws were strict against trapping and poaching, but they could not prevent a country boy from studying the plants and animals of his own parish, as Gilbert White, Charles Waterton and Darwin did; the ploughmen, shepherds and horsemasters followed the lore and wisdom of their craft so that they could accurately gauge the weather and detect sickness among their animals at the very outset. Superstitious folk declared that they had magic powers, and many tricks of the trade preserved among the gipsies and tinkers seemed miraculous to the gullible country people. The ratcatcher in

Romany Rye describes how he smeared himself with certain oils so that the vermin came pouring out of their holes and ran up his hands and arms; the Whisperers, who were said to have power over a horse by uttering a single word in its ear probably relied upon herbs and unguents which would react upon the animal's acute sense of smell.

John lived near the Welsh border among a people proud of their ancient ancestry and who still kept up many of the old ways, and it is almost certain that he acquired some of their knowledge. He had a knack of handling animals, but this would hardly have been sufficient for some of his more daring feats and probably he knew many of the secrets of the gipsy horsecopers and the queer hidden folk who lived among the woods and hills.

He kept a bear as a pet; he had purchased her, when very young, from a travelling showman who passed through Ellesmere. This gentleman threw in a monkey for good measure and charged thirty-five pounds for the pair, and he had the bear for seven years before she bit one of the servants so badly that she had to be put down. But she always knew and loved John, and once, when he disguised himself as a beggar and sought alms at Halston for a lark, she protected him from the attacks of his own dogs. George Underhill remembered her only too well. Stopping off on his way back from Chester Fair, he spent the evening drinking with John and ended up insensible. When he came to he was in bed with the bear and a couple of bull-dogs; the Squire's extravagant sense of humour had evidently proved too much for him.

All very well for John to scare his friends when it was not possible for them to retaliate. His reckless, unheeding courage enabled him to tackle most situations without fear, and he had no thought whatever for his own personal safety.

"Pray don't go near him, Mr Mytton," said the owner of a large savage dog chained in his yard, "for he will tear you to pieces if you do."

He watched, terrified, as John calmly approached the creature, winding a silk handkerchief round his left hand. As the dog seized

it John immediately grabbed him by the back of the neck, sank his teeth into the animal's muzzle, and proceeded to pummel him half insensible. The dog, afterwards, was less ferocious, but it was a piece of unnecessary, childish bravado which was John's usual answer to any form of challenge.

Harriet Emma had, by now, ceased to take any active interest in what her husband was doing. She watched apathetically from the window as spring unfolded across the parks and woodlands of Halston, feeling the April sun warm upon her face as she lay in a chair wrapped in blankets. The baby would soon be born, and she thought sadly and sometimes bitterly of her old friends who had never dreamed that she would be buried in the country without a single opportunity to come to town and show off her husband's wealth.

She knew that the Court was in mourning for the Regent's mother, who had died at Kew in the previous November, her skinny claw clasped in the sweating pudgy hand of her eldest son. Queen Charlotte had lived long enough to hear of the pregnancies of her two daughters-in-law, and as her dimming eyes gazed into the Regent's tear-drenched face she may have regretted the events which had led up to his wasted, barren marriage. There was a new favourite now, cold, grasping Lady Conyngham, whose husband, an Irish peer, was as much *mari complaisant* as Lord Hertford had been.

The fashionable world shrugged its shoulders and went about its business, thankful that the Queen's death had not spoiled the London season. They skimmed over life as lightly as Count d'Orsay skimmed over the cobbles in his beautiful powder-blue Tilbury, and those who dropped out of the charmed circle might as well have been dead for all that anyone remembered of them.

Occasionally the scandal of John's neglect and cruelty to his wife would be a talking point among the gossips and then her name would be recalled. Some would pity and some would laugh, but poor Harriet Emma remained out of touch and alone in her apathy.

She heard the sound of wheels and hooves in the drive, and

dragged herself to the window in time to see a phaeton and pair pull up at the front door. There being no servant immediately available to take the horses' heads the driver jumped down and cut them across the quarters with his whip. The animals reared, leaped forward and galloped out of sight around the corner, the phaeton rocking and swaying behind them and narrowly missing the angle of the wall. Somehow they reached the stable-yard unhurt, but John had entered the house without a backward glance. He went straight to the billiard room where a full decanter of brandy rested upon the sideboard; within the hour he had finished it, sullenly and without enjoyment.

They told him that his wife was in labour and he seemed less concerned than if it was one of his mares or heifers, and when at last the baby was born the doctor who came to tell him found him still slouching about in the billiard room.

"What is it?" John asked.

"On my telling him it was a girl," the doctor recalls, "he swore he would have it smothered—but, throwing himself upon the sofa, gave vent to his feelings in a flood of tears, and his anxiety for the well-doing of his lady would have done honour to any man."

The baby was christened Harriet Emma Charlotte by Mr Owen, and once John had got over the shock and disappointment of it being a female he began to take a great interest in the child. He was fascinated by the little creature cocooned in her swaddling bands, and would terrify the nurses when he took her from her cradle and threw her up to the ceiling as he did with his wife's lapdogs, but she thrived and grew strong in spite of his treatment.

The mother did not recover as she should have done. Harriet Emma had wished and prayed for a son, and she felt only guilt and apprehension at giving birth to a daughter. There were no reserves left to struggle with the consumption that was rapidly gaining ground and she felt less and less inclined to leave her bed.

Old Mrs Mytton spent a great deal of time in the sickroom trying to comfort her invalid, since John had quickly grown tired

of his wife's peevishness and had gone off to attend to more congenial affairs. There was a by-election pending for the borough of Shrewsbury, and the Squire, having listened to the advice of friends who ought to have known better, decided to stand as Tory candidate.



CHAPTER EIGHT



BEFORE the passing of the Reform Bill the man with the longest purse usually won an election. John's campaign one way and another cost him ten thousand pounds, and this was hardly surprising as one of his methods of canvassing was to ride in Shrewsbury wearing a coat with gold buttons and a ten-pound note attached to each, for the voters to snatch at. His opponent Mr Panton Corbett was in no way put out, and would walk down the main street jingling the gold in his well-filled pockets.

The elections of those days were usually accompanied by fights and riots, and it was disappointing if everything went off peacefully, but nomination day arrived without reports of violence and the candidates and their friends took their seats in the Town Hall at Shrewsbury.

Mr Cressett Pelham rose to address the meeting, begging leave to recommend to their notice John Mytton Esq., who was "inclined to serve the Town with that independence and liberty

which your merit requires at his hands, and which his situation in life requires him to perform."

Colonel Burg Leigh seconded the nomination, stating that John would do everything in his power for the interest of the County at large, and for this Town in particular.

The prospective Tory candidate then made a speech, and it is interesting to note that he had grace enough to deplore his past foolish actions.

"It is with much diffidence I thus offer myself to your service," he said. "I can only assure you that I appear here as a perfectly free and independent man, and if you do me the honour of electing me as your representative in Parliament, I shall never be biased by any party or private views. I shall fear that the follies of my youth have, in some instances, created in the public mind an impression unfavourable to my interest; but I trust, Gentlemen, that my future conduct will be such as to remove those impressions. I feel grateful for the very numerous promises of support which I have received, and which I doubt not will ensure our success."

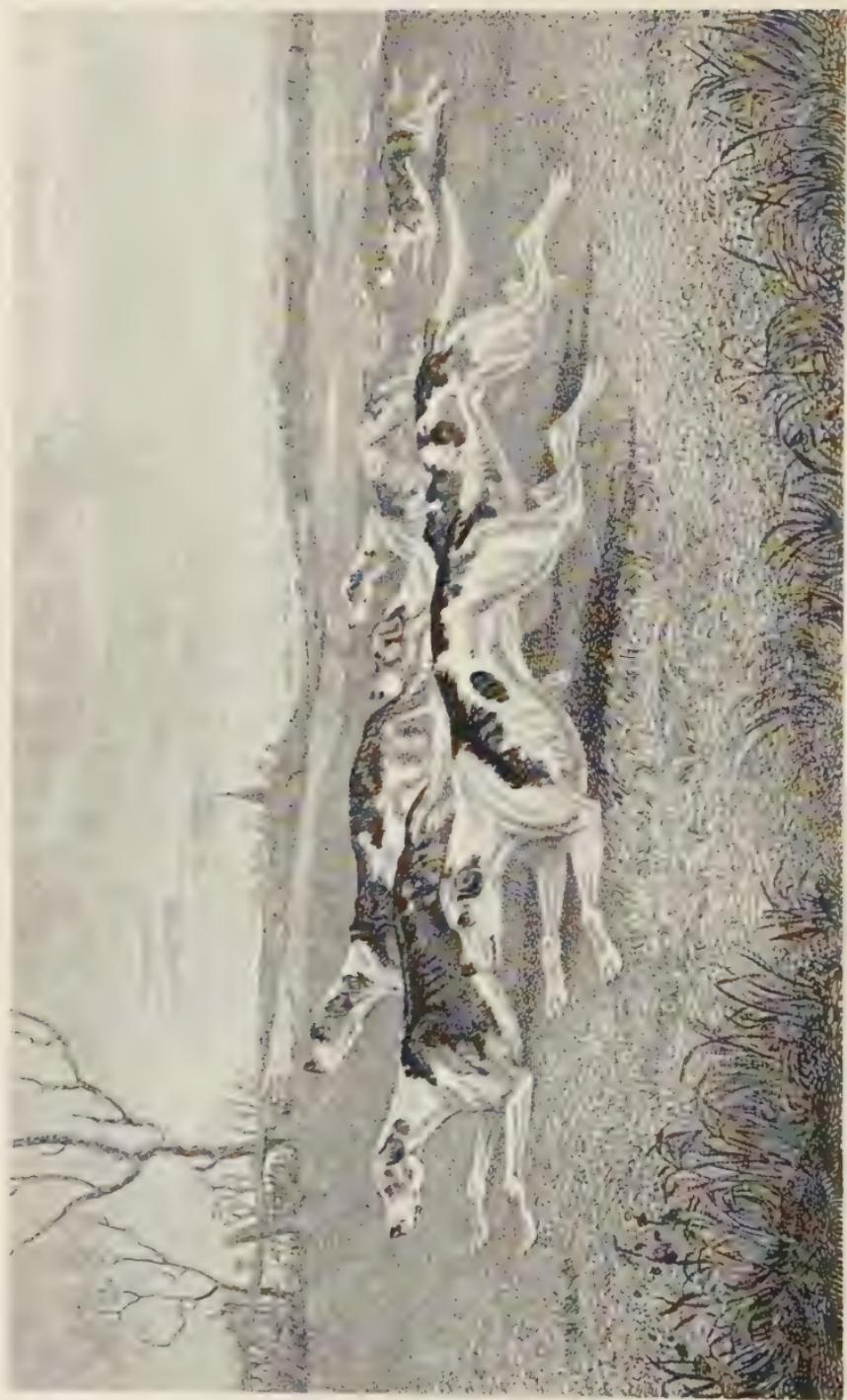
At that moment he sincerely meant what he said, but the emotions which sustained him did not last long and the noble promises were soon forgotten. Nevertheless Apperley remarks that his addresses to the constituents were particularly neat and appropriate, and were sufficiently convincing for him to receive a clear majority of ninety-seven when polling closed on May 25th.

During the days when the hustings were open the customary battles between the rival supporters raged furiously. One gentleman, innocently walking over the Welsh Bridge in Shrewsbury was seized and thrown into the river. "He swam out," *The Shrewsbury Chronicle* reported laconically, and there were enough incidents of this nature to satisfy the most hardened political campaigner.

John's address to the Burgesses after his election contained the pious hope that "all animosity may from this moment be forgotten, and that peace and good humour may be restored to this



Old English Hounds



Fox hounds in full cry

town", and when, on the following Monday, he was borne in triumph through Shrewsbury in a splendidly decorated car, Whig and Tory alike turned out to cheer him. All the pretty young ladies were at their windows to watch him as he went by, and the procession stopped at every pub where his supporters were drinking and toasting the new member.

At The Lion he leapt in through the window without waiting for it to be opened and delivered a message of thanks among the broken glass; the people cheered him until they were hoarse for thanks to his generosity a heifer had been killed and roasted and distributed among the poor, as well as more beer than they could drink.

Presently it was time for John to go up to Westminster and take his seat as Member for Shrewsbury. Now, at last, thought his family, he will give up his wild ways and respect the great honour which has fallen to him. They hardly hoped that he would make a great career for himself as a Parliamentarian, but they were totally unprepared for its brevity.

It was a warm, drowsy day in June. The atmosphere in the House was stuffy, the debate was boring, John listened with increasing restlessness for half an hour, then he crammed his hat on his head, left the Chamber, ordered his carriage and returned to Shropshire.

The Commons never saw him again, and perhaps, as it turned out, this was no bad thing, yet if John had had the will to apply himself conscientiously to a political career he might have succeeded. He had plenty of determination, courage, and charm; he was intelligent and well-read within a narrow field, and although the partial deafness which afflicted him was a handicap it was not an insuperable one. Nevertheless, the Member for Shrewsbury preferred to sit out the rest of the Parliamentary session far away from his elected fellows, and the borough Burgesses could whistle after the promises so bravely made upon the hustings.

While he was conducting his campaign the Duchess of Kent had given birth to a daughter, Victoria, fourth in succession to the

throne, and there was little to indicate what glories were in store for her. The seething unrest in the country was once more spilling over into the quiet complacent lives of those who shut their eyes to the conditions around them, sincerely believing that as these were ordained by God, nothing could be done to alleviate them.

Throughout that intensely hot summer, while the agitators whipped up the mobs, and working people were being drilled with pikes and clubs by the old soldiers of Wellington's armies, bands of Militia and Volunteers were being sent into the trouble spots of the industrial towns.

On August 16th, 1819, a great crowd of people began to converge on St Peter's Fields, an open space in Manchester. They had come to hear speakers demand the reform of Law and Parliament, and although they were unarmed and marched peacefully behind their banners, respectable people locked themselves in and orders were given for the yeomanry to be prepared. The city magistrates watched in terror from a nearby house as the mob, now augmented by the Irish weavers and most of Manchester's poor, waited expectantly for the speakers to address them.

Henry "Orator" Hunt was the first to mount the platform; the magistrates gave orders for the police to arrest him, at the same time detailing a party of yeomanry to force a way through the crowd to enable them to do so. Down below in the stifling heat emotions were at fever pitch, and the mounted soldiers lost their heads as the people jostled the horses to and fro. Drawing their sabres they slashed around them blindly; the panic-stricken mob, fighting to avoid the sharp blades, trampled upon one another in their frantic efforts to escape. The horrified onlookers watched as the people fled, screaming in terror, leaving behind the overturned hustings, torn garments, and the dead and the dying.

Eleven were killed and many seriously injured, women and children amongst them, and what had begun as a peaceful demonstration ended in a massacre. It gave the trouble-makers

a splendid opportunity to foment violence and hatred; the "Field of Peterloo" was held up as an example of the terrible inhumanity of the anti-radicals and the complete indifference of officialdom to personal suffering. Then the Government stepped in and took drastic measures, strengthening the existing laws against the bearing of arms, and prohibiting private drilling and the holding of certain kinds of outdoor meetings.

Once more the lid was crammed down on the cauldron, and the country gentlemen then in town rode back to the Shires with one eye open for the armed dissidents they believed to be lurking behind every hedgerow; even at quiet Halston precautions were taken in case roving bands of unemployed artisans should appear in the neighbourhood. Rising panic was not soothed by wild and unconfirmed reports of riots and looting in the towns, and anyone brought up before the magistrates on suspicion of incitement or sedition was sure of a harsh sentence. Frightened men are cruel, and there were many injustices both legal and personal and the bitter class struggle spread and intensified.

"In the meantime I see, and I see it with pleasure," Cobbett wrote, "that the common people know that they are ill-used, and they cordially, most cordially, hate those that ill-treat them."

The squires, now, as landlords, were beginning to be identified with the ogres accused by political pamphleteers of grinding the faces of the poor. Certainly there was an immense amount of useless expenditure; a hungry Lancashire weaver could take little comfort in hearing about Lord Derby's new dining room, which was fifty-three feet long and thirty-seven feet wide, with a great Gothic window at one end and a massive pair of doors at the other, all paid for out of the profits of the cotton mills. Maria Edgworth, visiting her friends the Hopes at Deepdene in Surrey found that, "The house is magnificently furnished, but to my taste too fine for a country house. . . . There is too much Egyptian ornament, Egyptian hieroglyphic figures, bronze and gilt, but all hideous."

William Beckford, who had poured out a fortune on the ugly

and useless Fonthill Abbey, wrote, "We eat grapes worthy of Fontainebleau, and cardoons like those of the Palais Royal; despite the rottenness of our climate they bring me sound and flavoured truffles."

But no one could accuse John of keeping more than modest state at Halston, and the household was well ordered since he had little or nothing to do with the running of it. Harriet Emma was too ill to pay much heed to domestic matters and Mrs Mytton was obliged once again to resume her duties as chatelaine. She had an excellent steward and an efficient staff; between them they kept the house in perfect condition, overcoming the difficulties created by John's heedlessness and the needs of a sick woman and a small baby, for Harriet Emma failed to rally as Christmas approached.

John was more often drunk than sober now, and his mother sometimes watched him mount for the hunting field when he could scarcely see to pick up the reins, yet his hunters all gave prodigious performances and he had less falls than many who went more carefully than he did.

"Throw your heart over and your horse will follow!" Assheton Smith had said, and John, with a bottle of brandy inside him, would pilot Baronet over brook and briar with no more than a pair of flapping elbows to guide him, and he told Apperley that he did not recollect ever having tired his horse so as not to be able to ride him home. He had many adventures with the Albrighton, which he regularly hunted now and by using a series of excellent covert hacks could travel nearly fifty miles to a meet and return by nightfall to his dinner. It must have been terribly hard on the horses, for he expected his mount to tackle any obstacle and keep up a cracking pace. Once he rode in on a post-horse which he managed to keep standing and uninjured in spite of the fact that it was still wearing collar and traces, for he had not waited to see it properly harnessed.

He hunted hounds at his own expense, which accounted for some of the thousands he spent annually on sport. It was before the days of subscription packs, although Hugo Meynell had

allowed a small number of his followers to pay for their pleasure, and Masters were still the owners and arbiters of their hounds. This was gradually changing as more and more people took up the sport, and were not content to follow the dictates of one man. By the thirties there were few private packs left, although when Sir Harry Goodricke took over the Quorn in 1831 he paid the whole of the six thousand pounds per annum which he considered necessary to maintain its establishment.

Under John the Albrighton must have shown an eccentric type of sport, for his pack was a mixture of foxhounds, staghounds and harriers which would follow anything anywhere. He spent a small fortune on bag-foxes which were supplied by a London dealer, but we are not told how many got away because of the unpredictable behaviour of his hounds. He did not worry much about the science of foxhunting; all he wanted was to follow a straight line and he was on such good terms with the local farmers that they permitted him to run where he would, although he must have done considerable damage. It was impossible to run a pack successfully without this goodwill, as Sir Bellingham Graham found a year later when he took on the Pytchley. Mysteriously, the country emptied itself of foxes and Sir Bellingham was forced to own himself beaten, relinquishing the Mastership after only one season, for, in spite of the successful action for trespass which Lord Essex had brought against the O.B.H., farmers were reluctant to use this method against unpopular sportsmen and preferred the more direct way of killing every fox they could lay their hands on. If a country was already badly stocked this could be disastrous to a Master who had to show his followers sport.

The Albrighton hunted through some of the most beautiful scenery in the Midlands, and anyone with a good horse under him could take pleasure in the golden autumn mornings and the crisp clean air. If John's friends began the day in a surly mood they were soon persuaded into a cheerful frame of mind by his absurd antics; once, having soaked himself falling into a brook he came home draped in one of the red flannel petticoats worn by the women of those parts, and he had been known to persuade an

old lady to part with hers in order to bandage his horse's knees when it came down with him on the road.

Those who were invited back to dine with him could never guess what extravagance he might invent on the way home, even plunging into the lake on horseback in order to win a bet that he would be first at his own front door, and after dinner when the company wanted nothing more than to be left to enjoy the excellent port, he would come riding in on the back of his pet bear, rowelling her with his spurs until she growled savagely.

He was an exhausting companion, especially to those closest to him. His dutiful visits to his wife became less and less frequent when he saw how she shrank from his exuberance; like many unimaginative people he could not bear illness, and he was disgusted and horrified by the pale shadow of the beautiful girl he had married eighteen months earlier. He had ceased to take any interest in his daughter although he was given regular reports of her welfare and progress, and as the year turned he was to be found again in his old haunts among the drunks and whores of Shrewsbury, Chester and Birmingham.

He was barely twenty-two, and in all his years he had never voluntarily accepted restraint; it never occurred to him that his wife's ill-health was any reason to curb his own activities. Because of this the County thought badly of him, and they had not forgiven him for tossing aside his Parliamentary responsibilities so lightly. Even the members for the rotten boroughs occasionally put in an appearance at Westminster if only for the look of the thing; John's election was fair and square and he should at least have shown some proper respect for the honour accorded him.

But presently their complaints were silenced, for the old mad King died on January 29th, 1820, and Parliament was automatically dissolved.

The Prince Regent became George the Fourth; his father had reigned for fifty-nine years through a cosmic cycle of wars, revolution and social change. The thrones of kings and emperors had toppled, and the discovery of steam power made certain a

vast new technology which would eventually remove all traces of the world which the son had inherited.

For a few days it was uncertain whether the new King would survive to take possession of his throne. Already ill at the time of his accession, he caught pneumonia standing out in the open to hear the proclamation read, and although the crisis passed he had to stay in bed for several weeks.

The Tory ministers may have been less fervent than was proper in their prayers for the Sovereign's recovery. The old King's death had brought them face to face with the embarrassing fact that Caroline of Brunswick was no longer Princess of Wales, but Queen of England, and the Whigs and Radicals were looking forward to her return as a means of causing further humiliation to the Government.

However, most of the country was convinced that she had committed adultery with several members of her suite and would therefore never risk coming back to England. The squires and their wives began to discuss the prospects for the King's Coronation and the opportunities for presenting their daughters; many excited, gossiping letters passed to and fro during the early spring.

Lady Williams Wynn wrote to her son, among other items of family news, "I am not sure whether you heard before you went away that poor Mrs Mytton is going off in a galloping consumption exactly as her sister did, one only wishes that her poor infant may go with her."

This morbid sentiment may have been an oblique reference to John's cruelty, but he was at last beginning to realise how serious his wife's illness was. The physicians urged him to take her away to the Hot Springs at Clifton, near Bristol, where the atmosphere was dryer and more temperate, and where the medicinal waters might benefit her debilitated condition. But they all knew that nothing could be done for her, and that if she left Halston for the West Country she would not return.

Of this Harriet Emma was unaware, and even rallied a little when they told her of the plan. Clifton Spa was a pleasant place,

not so fashionable as Bath or Cheltenham, but she would meet congenial company there and the prospect of social life, however limited, was delightful. But when they put her in the carriage for the start of the journey she looked back at Halston with a sense of foreboding; for a moment she was prepared to cry out that she did not want to leave but the coachman had shaken up the horses and they were moving down the drive.

The travelling had exhausted her, and when at last they arrived she was put to bed and could do no more than lie back and take nourishment from a spoon. The doctors were not hopeful. Nothing more could be done except to pray that the ruined lungs might by some miracle regain their health.

John was beside himself with grief and self-reproach. At last this spoilt young man had come face to face with something he could neither buy off nor charm away, and he realised that his neglect and ill-treatment had been partly responsible for it. He thought of Apperley, who was still in Shropshire; it seemed that only this man could help him through the long, agonising days, and he sent an urgent message. Apperley came, to comfort him as best he could, and when Harriet Emma died on July 2nd, he remained with John during the melancholy preparations for the removal of the body.

She was buried ten days later in the chapel by the lake at Halston; Mr Owen read the funeral service and John wept, perhaps less for her than for himself, engulfed in such bitter loneliness.

After a while, however, he began to lead his life as though Harriet Emma had never been, and there was no fourteen-month-old child upstairs in the nursery. He forgot the image of his dead wife in the crude reality of the brandy bottle, although at the back of his mind was the thought that he must marry again. There was still no son to carry on his name, only the little daughter he had so despised at her birth and who might grow up to take the great inheritance of Halston into another man's family.

But when the period of mourning was over he showed no

inclination to look for another wife; rather it seemed as though he spent most of his time trying to break his neck. He rode far and wide with the Albrighton; no obstacle was too big for him to tackle and he galloped prodigious distances after his hounds. Some thought he was possessed by the Devil, and that he could not escape even though he fled to the ends of the land.



CHAPTER NINE



JOHN did not stand again for Parliament after the dissolution, stating in a letter to his constituents that, ". . . Finding a proper and punctual attention to your interests and that of the country at large is incompatible with my present pursuits, it is not my intention to become a candidate for your suffrages".

This honesty enabled his old opponent John Panton Corbett to gain the seat, much to the relief of the Shrewsbury Tories, and left John free to enjoy the start of the shooting season, and to address himself to the average annual slaughter of "twelve hundred brace of pheasants, from fifteen hundred to two thousand hares, partridges without number".

He not only reared his birds but purchased them live as well, from the same London dealer who supplied his foxes, an expense justified by the thousands he and his friends killed during the season. But because the art of driving was not properly understood there were many hens and youngsters amongst them, and often the carcases were unusable through being shot at close quarters.

The rearing of gamebirds was now widely practised, and it was possible to obtain very large bags. As Mrs Arbuthnot noted in her Journal, "I went out shooting with Mr Arbuthnot and the D. of Wellington. I never in my life saw anything to equal the quantity of pheasants; the fields were quite darkened with them in the evening when they came out of the woods to feed."

The sport was becoming immensely popular mainly through the efforts of one man. Joseph Manton was the most famous gunmaker in England, and he had so perfected the flintlock that a Manton gun was a miracle of lightness, efficiency and durability. Men who had hitherto kept away from shooting were now taking to it in increasing numbers; nevertheless even a weapon from the prince of gunsmiths could be unreliable, and it was clumsy to load and operate. An enthusiastic shot would have to take with him a ramrod, powder flask, flint, balls and wads, as well as a variety of cleaning materials, for the barrel had to be scoured frequently.

Once the gun was loaded great care was needed not to jar the charge, and this meant careful carrying over rough and uneven ground. Sometimes the charge would be put in awry, or too great a quantity of powder used, and then the unlucky sportsman might lose or damage two or three fingers.

Charles Waterton sustained such an accident, which he describes with the characteristic sang-froid of his class.

"I repaired to a tenant's house and poured warm water plentifully through the wound until I had washed away the marks of gunpowder, then collecting up the ruptured tendons which were hanging down I replaced them carefully and bound up the wound, not forgetting to give the finger its original shape as nearly as possible. After this I opened a vein with the other hand and took away to the extent of two and twenty ounces of blood."

No wonder sandwiches and brandy were recommended as a palliative for shattered nerves when out shooting.

John's skill with a shotgun was supposed to have been balanced

by his facility in the use of a rifle, but Apperley, surprisingly, does not attempt to verify this, "never having seen him with either pistol or rifle in his hand".

He could shoot, it was said, through the peg-hole of a trimmer used for pike-fishing at a distance of fifty yards, and he was also credited with having killed rats with a rifle from the top of his house. This certainly does not seem very likely, unless it was a fluke, nor does the story that he put a bullet through a gentleman's hat while it was still on his head.

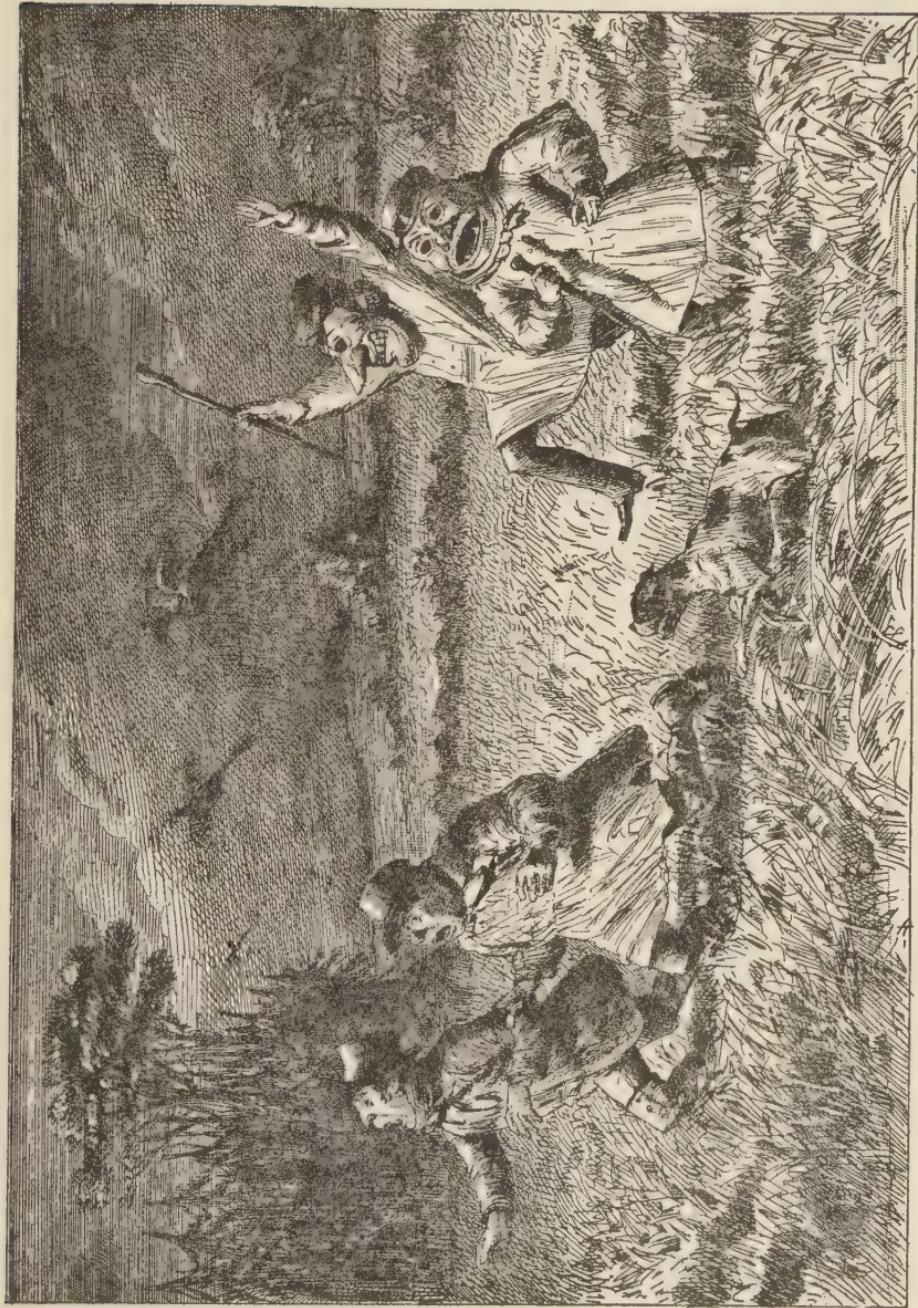
But it seems possible, and in character, that he laid the wire of a spring-gun in the path which he knew Mr Owen would take on his way to church, and when that unfortunate person let off the booby trap he accused him of shooting at pheasants on a *Sunday*.

Mr Owen was so overcome, both by the explosion and by his patron's unfounded and unwarranted insinuations, that he refused to face his congregation until a suitable amount of liquor had been poured down his throat, and we are told that "two glasses of Madeira made the parson all right again".

Most victims of John's violence or practical joking were compensated either with drink or with money, and it was worth while being knocked down for the sake of the tip afterwards as many blacksmiths and coalheavers in the Shrewsbury area could testify, but a drunken tradesman who ventured to call him "Johnnie" got a black eye. Squire Mytton had his limits, and often where his dignity was concerned he lost his sense of humour.

Once when he was staying in London he paid a visit to Lord Derby's staghounds, and the rumour got around that he was a Whitechapel tailor out for the day. This so infuriated him that when Lord Derby expressed his surprise at seeing him, John retorted, "Why, to tell you the truth, Stanley, I have ridden over many a good fellow in my own country but I never rode over a Cockney and I am come here today for that sole purpose!"

At the end of the 1820-21 season John gave up the Albrighton in order to devote more of his time and money to his race-horses.



How to preserve pheasants by John Leech

During 1820 he had thirteen horses in training, and three of them, Anti-Radical, Mandeville and Halston had won him over four hundred pounds between them as well as three gold cups, but the expenses still exceeded the receipts in spite of all Will Dunn's efforts to keep them down, for John often ran his animals without a prospect of winning for the sole purpose of giving sport, and because of this he was extremely popular on the courses.

"Tis a pity the country people should have come so far from home and not have some fun," he would say, and his supporters knew that when he appeared there would usually be some bizarre episode to amuse them.

"That's he! That's Mytton!" they would cry to those of their friends who did not know him.

"He looks loike a good 'un," someone might reply. "They tell me he can foight 'nation well."

Many people came to the race meetings in the hope of seeing Squire Mytton take action in a brawl, and usually they were not disappointed. He attracted trouble as a conductor rod attracts lightning, and if the fight was not his he joined in anyway. A man was usually drunk if he tried to take him on single-handed; once two burly miners attempted it in an effort to steal his watch. John simply held them both at arm's length and then ran their heads together with such force that one of them was unconscious for an hour.

Such achievements were not likely to assist him in his office of High Sheriff of Merionethshire, which he assumed in February 1821 by virtue of the estates which he held there. Dinas Mowddy was his favourite shooting box, and during his term of office he was often there to the great delight of the children in the district. He set the boys to running and fighting for small sums of money, and sometimes, when he was out with his gun, he would get them to throw small objects in the air for him to shoot at. There was a legend that he never missed. The people of this remote Welsh valley were charmed and delighted with their jolly Squire who came among them with his pockets full of

silver and provided feasts for the poor whenever he thought about it. He was always gay and laughing, ready to swing the smaller children on his shoulder and carry them about pick-a-back, until they screamed with delighted terror. Even the bigger ones, who were dared to the ascent of a local mountain, bore their cuts and bruises with stoicism if it meant half a guinea to take home, and at the end of the season the Squire's departing carriage would be escorted by a troop of urchins hullooing him away into the green Shropshire fields.

But his Welsh tenants were disappointed that he had no wife to accompany him in his duties as High Sheriff, and County folk were saying that it was high time the vacant places in the Halston nurseries were filled. Yet they were reluctant to advance their daughters for the honour; John's reputation was by now extremely low and it was only the money that made them think again. John himself was completely indifferent, one woman was much the same as another except that some were worse, and if he was taken up on this he could point to the King himself as an example of a man bedevilled by a female.

Caroline had been persuaded the previous autumn by her Whig friends to return to England, in spite of the fact that ever since she had been abroad her husband had been collecting evidence against her which could be used in a divorce suit. Some of the allegations were so serious that they could not be kept secret; Caroline was obliged to come before Parliament and listen to assertions of her adultery with members of her suite, but so many of the witnesses brought against her were discredited by her brilliant counsel Henry Brougham that eventually the proceedings had to be dropped.

London had been close to revolution during the progress of the "Queen's Trial" as supporters of one side or the other fought pitched battles, but as soon as it was all over Caroline and her troubles were quickly forgotten, although she tried to keep public interest alive by frequently appearing in the City wearing a black wig and a great deal of make-up.

The King's Coronation was postponed until the following year,

but at last on July 19th, 1821, he was crowned in Westminster Abbey with great pomp and magnificence. During the Banquet which followed, John's old C.O., the Marquis of Anglesey, was required in his capacity of Lord High Steward to enter Westminster Hall upon horseback, together with the Duke of Wellington and Lord Howard of Effingham, accompanying the dishes of meat which were served to the King as a first course. When this was done the three peers backed from his presence the full length of the hall, a considerable feat for Anglesey who had only one leg with which to prompt his charger.

Caroline had not been allowed even to enter the Abbey. She had been turned away at the door; bitter and humiliated she drove back to her lodgings, and a fortnight later she died, probably from peritonitis although there were rumours that she had been poisoned.

A great deal was forgiven and forgotten in the wave of patriotism which engulfed Britain during that Coronation year. The sentimental mystique which surrounds Royalty on these occasions found full expression in ballads and prints; tradition and legend became a popular study and the works of Sir Walter Scott were much in demand. There was a trade boom in 1821, food prices were low and the majority of the unemployed in the industrial towns had found work; the young bloods and their fair companions knew nothing of this but the world seemed delightful to them too as they skimmed along in their Tilbury gigs.

Mrs Arbuthnot wrote in her Journal, "The ladies and the dandies have taken to riding in the Mall in St James' Park, in such numbers as to be quite a nuisance. Yesterday I am sure that there must have been above a hundred, and in that narrow road it was quite dangerous."

There was so much gaiety and merriment that the news of the death in May of Bonaparte came as a shock to those who realised that it was barely six years since the Battle of Waterloo, and many who had since become enormously rich could hardly remember what life had been like during the war years. But

the poor remembered, and the Radicals never lost an opportunity to compare their wretched state with that of the wealthy landowner.

“English country gentlemen are the most cruel, the most unfeeling, the most brutally insolent,” declared Cobbett in 1825, but by then many properties had changed hands, the ancient families in whose possession they had been for centuries impoverished by a succession of agricultural disasters and forced to sell to the new rich. The ironmasters, coal-owners and industrial magnates were replacing the squires in the vulnerable areas close to the big cities where most of their wealth was, but Shropshire was at that time inescapably rural, apart from the centuries-old coal mines across the border, and Mytton property was therefore unlikely to attract the attention of the tycoons, but the County was exceedingly worried by reports of John’s incessant spending and of the tremendous debts he was beginning to incur, for the loss of the Albrighton had not meant the curtailment of his sport.

He still kept on the two home packs, augmented by some which he bought from Essex, and hunted bag foxes in the woods and fields of Halston to the great joy of all who beheld him. Several people had seen him emerge from the brook into which he had been decanted, stand on his head and declare, “That’s the way to empty your boots!”

And it seemed apt that Lord Anson, who had purchased some of the Albrighton hounds, should declare that “they were somewhat wild and uncertain, but capable of pursuing anything from an elephant to an earwig”.

He was gambling heavily, too, that summer. In one of the London gaming houses he broke the bank and came away with several thousand pounds; we are not told how much of it remained to him when he arrived back in Shropshire. This wayward wilful existence, with the bouts of drunkenness when it was impossible to reason with him, continued for about a year after Harriet Emma died. Mr Owen, perhaps alone of John’s immediate circle realised the underlying insecurity and loneliness

which afflicted his patron, and in his forthright way urged him to remarry.

It so happened that Apperley had taken a house at Brewood in Staffordshire while on his drift southward, and among a wide circle of friends he made in this neighbourhood were the Giffards of Chillington, a large sporting family of some considerable wealth.

He had several times invited John to stay with him, realising that his old friend might benefit from a change of scene and atmosphere, and it was natural that the Giffards should be asked over to meet him. Walter, the eldest son, took an instant liking to John, and could never hear enough about his sporting activities and they found they had much in common.

Presently invitations to Chillington for Apperley included John as well.

There were four other Giffard sons and several daughters; one of them, Caroline, had from her earliest days been accustomed to the hazards of the chase and to handling unruly horses. Her father had been an ardent foxhunter who rode over his lands "dressed in scarlet with a large pair of spurs on his heels and a foxbrush in his hat," and he took care to see that all his children, sons and daughters alike, could both ride and shoot. Caroline, at seventeen, was frankly hard-bitten, but she was capable, good-natured, and attractive.

Probably John was interested in her from the beginning, and anyone more different from Harriet Emma it would be impossible to imagine. She spoke to him in his own language, refused to be teased or intimidated, and showed herself to be thoroughly capable of handling him. John was completely captivated and made up his mind to marry her, but her mother, Lady Charlotte Giffard, confided her doubts to Apperley.

The young man was known to be unstable; his first wife had died, it was said, as the result of his ill-usage, but yet he was possessed of a considerable fortune.

"The pros and cons were nicely weighed, and weighed again . . . and they appeared evenly to balance the scale. We all

believed that there was a fair prospect of happiness in the intended union."

Lady Charlotte's hesitation did her credit, but it was largely overcome by the contemplation of John's income and the fact that she had several other daughters to place in life; the Giffard brothers were only too pleased to welcome a famous sportsman into the family for they thought of nothing else. After all, there was a good chance that the marriage would be a successful one since John and Caroline had enjoyed an upbringing in identical social circumstances, and Miss Giffard was determined and strong-minded enough to keep her husband where she wanted him.

They were pleasantly enough occupied that autumn. She walked with him in the grounds of Chillington and laughed when he told her of his escapades. She was attracted by his raffishness but shrewd enough to realise that reforming him would take time and patience and for the moment she was content to let him have his head, like one of her young thoroughbreds, but nevertheless her guiding hand was there upon the rein.

They were married on October 29th, 1821, and the County foretold disaster almost before the banns were put up. Anything which Mytton touched was either crooked, impractical or dangerous, but time passed and the couple showed such tenderness towards one another that even the most determined pessimists had to change their opinions. During the winter, to everyone's astonishment, John kept off the drink and did not even seem to miss his hounds; Caroline was touched at the obvious effort he was making and her love deepened. The elder Mrs Mytton was delighted with her new daughter-in-law, whose influence over her son was already so beneficial, but Caroline had come into his life too late. Habits which set the pattern of his existence had gained complete hold of him, and although she did more than anyone else to keep him to a reasonable behaviour every now and then a glimpse of his other personality would show in an outburst of jealousy or a flash of temper. Finally, when she ceased to mean anything to him either as a wife or as a woman, his ruin and

degradation were complete, but by then he had no control over himself or his actions.

It was a new experience for him to find a woman who was neither clinging nor brazen. Caroline had a sense of humour which took his practical jokes in such good part that it was hardly worth while carrying them out, and she cut the ground from under his feet by allowing him his freedom right from the start. Since it was not forbidden it ceased to be attractive, and he seldom left her side, taking great pleasure in riding and driving with her, visiting friends and behaving as his family had hoped and prayed that he would ever since he came of age. By December Caroline was pregnant; strong and robust, she considered it to be a small matter and refused to let herself be cossetted. Old Mrs Mytton looked forward to the pleasures of grandmotherhood without foreboding; this young healthy girl would never slip into a decline as poor Harriet Emma had done. Christmas that year was one of the happiest John had known, and Mr Owen gave heartfelt thanks for it, praying that his young patron might at last have found real joy and companionship. It was much too early to decide whether he had undergone complete reformation, but as the days passed placidly the Mytton household began to relax and settle down into a peaceful routine for the first time in months, and there was leisure now to think of Harriet Emma Charlotte, nearly three years old and grown into a sturdy little girl.

Her young stepmother was kind to her and persuaded John to take an interest in his daughter so that the nursery was once more a noisy place as he tried to teach her the *View Halloo*, or brought his dogs along to make friends. Caroline, herself one of an enormous family, reflected that at this age John had been orphaned and left to run wild and undisciplined; his children at least should know the kindly restraint of a sensible upbringing. Without showing the least disrespect for her mother-in-law Caroline gradually assumed control of the household functions, quietly getting her own way and establishing a pattern of life in which John became involved almost without his being aware of it.

She integrated him so skilfully that it was second nature to act in accordance with her wishes and accept whatever decision she chose to make, and by the second anniversary of Harriet Emma's death she had organised and arranged Halston affairs so efficiently that everyone wondered how they had managed without her.



CHAPTER TEN



APPERLEY, the faithful companion who had brought this couple together, was at last driven from Staffordshire by the state of his purse and settled in London with the expressed intention of writing a sporting book. He was told by a friend that he was much more likely to make money if he wrote regularly for *The Sporting Magazine*.

"That will never do!" Apperley retorted. "It is a mere Cockney concern and no gentleman writes for it."

However, early in the New Year of 1822 hunger and poverty forced him to pocket his pride, and he submitted an article entitled "Foxhunting in Leicestershire" over the pseudonym of "Nimrod". It was at once accepted and others commissioned and presently so many people were wishing to read these charming, well-informed pieces on hunting, coaching and the care of horses that the magazine doubled its circulation. Soon Apperley was famous and his nom-de-plume had become a commercial success attached to a brand of boot blacking, a road coach, and a cut of breeches, while the man himself became a glorified hunting correspondent.

The material for his subsequent articles was collected on sporting tours which were paid for by the magazine, and his expenses were enormous since he considered that nothing was too good for him, and that he must have the best horses, servants and accommodation. Apperley's demands upon *The Sporting Magazine* increased with its circulation; the editor was so fearful of losing him that he agreed to every item and paid out over nine thousand pounds during the next six years.

“Nimrod's” reputation preceded him into the Shires where the local packs vied for the honour of his visits. He was flattered, feted and honoured, usually staying at one of the great houses in the district, and a “Nimrod” tour was a luxurious progress from one grand establishment to another.

With his six hunters, covert hack, grooms, valet and chef he created a sensation in the sporting world, and lorded it among the foxhunters until 1829, when the editor of *The Sporting Magazine* died and he severed his connection with the publication. Out of a job, and without the means to support himself since there was now no market for his writing, Apperley went off to France to live quietly on the little money he had left, but after a while the editor of *The Quarterly Review* commissioned three articles from him which were destined to become some of the most famous among sporting literature.

“The Chace”, “The Road” and “The Turf” sealed his reputation as a descriptive writer, and led to many other assignments which would have enabled him to return to England if he had wished, but he found the peaceful French countryside less distracting and remained there for the last twelve years of his life.

It was very fortunate for John that Apperley was living in Calais when the former was forced to run from his creditors and take refuge there, for by then the worst had happened and he was a confirmed alcoholic, hardly able to take care of himself. Apperley looked after his old friend devotedly until matters were taken out of his hands and John obliged to return to England where, lacking any restraint, he drank himself to death.

But in 1822, when “Nimrod” was beginning his writing

career, there was nothing to indicate this. John was in great form and full of pranks. He loved to ride Baronet up the steps of his friends' houses, and right inside if they would let him, and he had often taken the one-eyed horse round the billiard table at Halston and out at the front door. If John handled horses "he really appeared to have some sort of magic influence over their tempers", and certainly Baronet never suffered from any of these freakish adventures. Long after both he and his master were dead, people would repeat the tale of the time when John had gone into a house near Wem after a hard day's hunting, and begged for warmth and food for himself and Baronet. A fire was stoked up in the kitchen and the man and the horse had made themselves comfortable before the blaze, with hot gruel for the one and mulled ale for the other.

The summer days of 1822 passed lightheartedly until Caroline gave birth to her child on August 9th. It was a girl, christened Barbara Augusta; John was disappointed and showed it and for a while it seemed as though they would not be reconciled. But Caroline was able to exert her influence as soon as she was strong enough to leave her bed and they were presently on good terms again.

He had by this time entered into a kind of partnership with John Beardsworth, a rich horse-dealer from Birmingham, in order to try and run his racing stable at a profit. Caroline suspected the man's motives right from the beginning and was against her husband's association with him, but she did not actively try to break it, knowing the futility of direct opposition. She hoped to win him round by gentle persuasion, but Beardsworth, sensing her antagonism, kept discreetly in the background. John was trusting enough to allow him carte blanche and purchased many of Beardsworth's recommendations at a price which allowed the dealer to make a handsome profit, the seventeen horses in training during 1822 were not all good ones and John's impatience forced many to be run beyond their limits.

He had the great misfortune also to lose Will Dunn, who was killed on the Chester Roodee racecourse when his mount Mallett fell with him, and the stud-groom, John Craggs, was fatally

injured by a shying horse. The deaths of these two good servants meant that all their experienced assistance was lost to him at a time when he desperately needed it and Beardsworth was taking advantage of Caroline's preoccupation with her baby to insinuate himself further into the household.

The stud, far from becoming more efficient, was a constant drain on his resources and within eight years the number of horses in training had been reduced to two.

In December of 1822 he again refused to stand for Parliament in the election which took place in Shrewsbury, seconding instead his foxhunting friend, the eccentric Mr Cressett Pelham, but he was unable to resist taking part in the campaign and enthusiastically joined in the brawls and street-fighting which were an integral part of electioneering. Mr Cressett Pelham was duly returned and borne triumphantly through the streets in a decorated chariot, with John riding beside him acknowledging the cheers of the crowds. Mr Cressett Pelham, in spite of his eccentricity, professed solid Tory principles which satisfied the respectable citizens of Shrewsbury; any mention of Parliamentary reform was apt to throw them into a panic of fear and suspicion. The ruling Establishment could not forget the horrors of the Revolution; reform meant Jacobinism, murder, chaos and increased freedom for the working man, and it was the duty of every right-minded citizen to applaud and uphold the noble sentiments expressed by his Majesty and by his Ministers. Among these there had been no hint of Reform.

The squires had bowed the knee to the King at his Coronation as a true symbol of a law-abiding society, and they were pleased to see that the State visits to Ireland and Scotland had revealed a unanimity of goodwill even within those remote places. They could wish that there were more opportunities for the Crown to show itself to the people, but King George was suffering from increasingly severe attacks of gout and intended to lead a retired life at Royal Lodge, Windsor, only occasionally visiting the Pavilion at Brighton which had finally been completed after more than forty years of enlargement and alteration. He was sixty

now, a ripe old age in those days, nevertheless the possibility of his remarriage was continually discussed, and when he had visited Hanover the previous autumn it was assumed that he had gone there to find another wife. But all he brought back was a stud of the famous cream-coloured horses.

His liaison with Lady Conyngham was carried on in circumstances of the utmost propriety, and the visits *en tout ménage* to Brighton Pavilion were, according to Croker, the dullest possible affairs. It was less fashionable now to act the rake, more tonnish to show an interest in gentle and intellectual subjects like gardening and architecture. Reaction against the brutality and licentiousness of the eighteenth century was being encouraged by the Nonconformist preachers, many of them Methodists, who were exhorting their congregations to forgo cruel sports and drunkenness if they sought salvation, and gradually the old ways were giving place to humanity and tolerance.

There is no evidence that Caroline Mytton's outlook was an unconscious reflection of the new spirit, but every aspect of life at Halston benefited from the influence of this sensible, forthright girl, and Apperley remarked, "If a wife had been selected for Mr Mytton with a view to reclaiming him, and making him a domestic character and a kind husband, she might have been the woman fixed for the experiment . . . In short, there was every prospect of happiness from this union, and for some years indeed it appeared to be realised."

She had undertaken the thankless task of marrying a rake in order to reform him, as her predecessor had done, but unlike Harriet Emma she had succeeded within eighteen months in bringing him into the fold of convention as a solid and respected citizen. His former companions waited for Mad Jack to tire of domesticity and the quiet pleasures of family life, unable to swallow the idea of him as a respectable married man, but as time passed it seemed as though Caroline had not only tamed him but had kept his interest and affection so that he preferred to spend time in the nursery teaching little Harriet the View Halloo rather than flounce off to the taverns.

He improved in health and looks and his friends congratulated him on his appearance, but beneath his newly-acquired placidity the old fires were still burning, occasionally to show themselves in some prank or practical joke. He conceived a desire for heron pie, the young birds, he declared, were much superior to rooks, but in all the estate no one could be found who was willing to climb up the tall tree to the herony and rob the nests.

"Here goes then," said John, taking off his coat, and, watched anxiously by the gamekeepers, clambered up into the topmost branches and secured the squawking, ungainly youngsters. He got his heron pie, and a scolding from Caroline, who was by then expecting another child. Sir Bellingham Graham was astounded when, his broken arm in a sling, John turned out with the Albrighton, performing his usual tricks and jumping in and out of a stackyard, although he must have been in considerable pain.

There was worry about money. The great income was gradually being drained away and the expenses were rising although Caroline and Mrs Mytton managed as well as they could, and Longueville the agent was continually at his master's elbow with pleas for economy. But no sooner were costs pruned on one project than they rocketed on another, and all the time Beardsworth was encouraging John to buy anything that took his fancy so that many animals purchased were hardly worth their keep. Yet every now and then a good horse came into his hands, and one of these was a seven year old which turned out to be the finest he ever owned. This was the celebrated Euphrates, winner of innumerable cups and wagers; John was so delighted with the animal that he named one of his sons after him.

His servants contended ceaselessly with his eccentricities yet loved him to a man, and one of the most remarkable things about John was his ability to inspire such loyalty. The charm that persuaded two women to marry him, and countless animals to trust him, was based on his honesty and goodness of heart, and it was tragic that no firm hand had guided his formative years. "I have always regarded him," said Underhill, "as a modern

prototype of Timon of Athens, the victim of circumstances caused by those who professed to be his friends."

The first anniversary of his marriage to Caroline had passed in an atmosphere of reconciliation. He had forgiven her for presenting him with another daughter and since she had recovered so well from the birth there seemed every likelihood of further increases. Perhaps the next child would be the son they both wanted so desperately, and in the meantime he carried out his social obligations according to the pattern that Caroline laid down for him. He took a commission in the local detachment of the Shropshire Yeoman Cavalry, as his father had done before him, and he liked to be known as Major Mytton. Superbly mounted, he rode at the head of his men if ever they were called upon to perform military manoeuvres, and they looked upon him with great affection as the troopers of the 7th Hussars had done.

Early in 1823 he was appointed High Sheriff of Shropshire. Caroline was delighted, for it seemed that at last he was really reformed and ready to take his place in County society as one of its richest, most respected, powerful and popular members. His fellow justices may have glanced wryly at him and reflected that it was somewhat ironic he should have to attend the assizes and quarter sessions and pronounce the fate of the one hundred and forty prisoners who came up before him during his term of office, but there is no reason to suppose that he discharged his duties badly or inefficiently. The performance of a public role, once it became incumbent upon him, was as natural to him as it had been to his father, and his easy friendly manner, combined with his new-found sobriety and sense made him an agreeable companion at County and civic functions. The citizens of Oswestry were so impressed with his behaviour that they elected him Mayor, and he added this care to his others with perfect equanimity.

It was convenient that Sir Bellingham Graham had taken on the Albrighton, for John would hardly have had time to run the pack even if he had wished to do so, but often he regretted giving it up for no amount of sport could compensate for the pleasure of directing one's own hounds, especially as new methods of

management were beginning to add fresh enjoyment to the chase.

Thanks to Meynell's influence, the hounds were being bred for speed as well as for good noses, so that the pace of the sport had increased considerably since the beginning of the century. The half-bred horse which had possessed strength and agility without being a fast mover had been replaced by the thoroughbred, racy, keen, at best a capital fencer, but often not up to weight.

The squires were heavy riders who could tire their animals quickly, and it was Ralph Lambton and his brother who first thought of using a second horse, on to which they could change when their own mounts showed signs of flagging. These reliefs were ridden closely behind their masters by lightweight grooms, but it was not until Lord Sefton became Master of the Quorn in 1800 that the idea was generally popular, and had so greatly increased the size of the fields that by the time Apperley was on his sporting rounds the second horseman was required only to ride to points, meeting his master at the most favourable moment, and not allowed to jump fences at all.

Several customs were also in process of dying out, or being abolished, as enlightened Masters became intent upon improving their sport. The tradition that the first man up at the kill was entitled to the brush led to many a hound being maimed or slaughtered as rival followers rode amongst them, and soon it became the Master's privilege to award the brush to anyone he thought fit.

Capping, or collecting for the huntsman after he had made his kill, also led to many abuses, for when scent was poor hounds might be laid on to hare or rabbit in the hopes that when the field rode up the creature would be killed and eaten and so passed off as a fox.

Standards of conduct were gradually being improved, and presently it was considered unsportsmanlike to dig out a hunted fox, and indeed if the earth stoppers had done their job properly this should not be necessary. Sometimes, however, influential persons insisted on it being done in order that they could qualify

their horses for the hunt races, an attendance at three or more kills being required.

The life of a Master was beset by worries, both material and financial, not the least of which was the problem of controlling a large field in which many riders were resentful of discipline. Some never succeeded in doing it at all; others, like Assheton Smith and Sir Harry Goodricke, were renowned for their strictness.

John, at least, was free from the grumbling of sulky followers when there was no scent or hounds failed to draw, and he was content to remain a follower himself, occasionally even hiring his hunters from the famous Mr Tilbury, who had livery stables all over the country. The Halston pack was solely to amuse himself and his friends, and he had a gaggle of half-bred terriers to show him sport at harvest time when the rats were cornered in the granary. His racehorses were bringing a few wagers and trophies; it was Euphrates' first year with his new master and he won the King's Plate at Chester and a gold cup at Worcester. Maurice Jones, the trainer who replaced William Dunn, was an honest, sensible man of the old school, and there was no love lost between him and Beardsworth; he tried conscientiously to carry out his tasks and please his capricious master, but there was little he could do with indifferent stock, and often, when John asked him, "Shall we win this race, Maurice?" he had to temporise. "Well, I can't say, indeed, sir; but I think we shall be nigh handy, please God."

That autumn, John waited impatiently for the birth of his second child, hunting and shooting with his friends and occasionally donning his Major's uniform and taking a turn with the Yeoman Cavalry.

He had already been able to prevent a riot while commanding his detachment. The North Wales colliers went on strike and some of them began to march threateningly towards the town of Oswestry; John and his men were called upon to stop them. The two parties came face to face outside the town, and John, drawing his sword with a flourish, went towards them alone, wondering at the same time why the strikers' menacing gestures had given

way to shouts of laughter. Looking up he saw that the weapon he was brandishing so gallantly had been ground down to within a few inches of the hilt.

His sense of humour got the better of him and he joined in the amusement with great delight. Thrusting the useless stump of steel back into its scabbard he walked up to the miners' leaders, shook hands with them and persuaded them to return to their homes after he had bought them all a drink. The situation, though it had ended so absurdly, had required considerable courage, and John found himself treated as a hero. The people of Oswestry were convinced that he had saved them from massacre and sack, and Caroline was immensely proud of him, certain that her child would be a son to crown the year's achievements.

On November 20th, 1823, her hopes were realised. The heir was born, and the celebrations for his arrival exceeded anything that had been seen at Halston since his father's coming of age.



CHAPTER ELEVEN



THE salute of twenty-one guns which heralded the baby's birth was a signal to the County to put on gala dress and attend the splendid parties which John had arranged. Shrewsbury had hung out its flags and rung its bells, a great dinner was prepared at the Talbot Inn and the poor were not forgotten; twenty-five whole sheep were set aside for them.

The baby was christened John Fox FitzGiffard by Mr Owen, a combination of names which seems to have been suggested by the father. He was almost beside himself with pride and delight and his friends rejoiced with him. "This above all," they said, "will help him to settle down into a good life."

After Christmas there was a severe frost, the ground was too hard for hunting and John was full of pranks and foolishness. He let out a bag-fox and unkennelled his hounds although there was no hope of anyone following them either on horseback or on foot, consequently, said Apperley, they were seen no more



John Mytton in 1818. *From a miniature by John Webb*



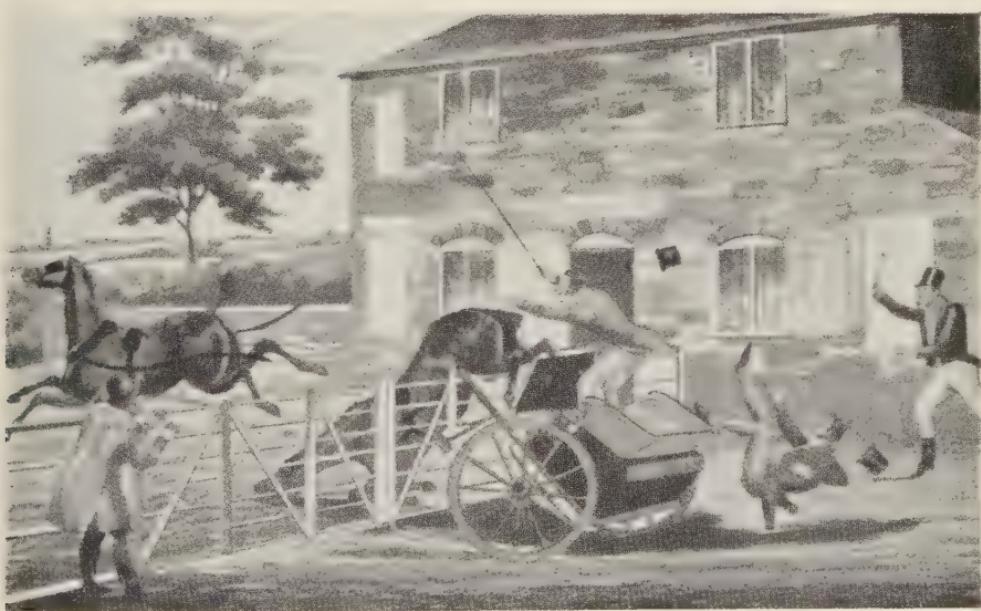
The nearest way home



Mytton wild duck shooting



What! never upset in a gig?



"I wonder whether he is a good timber jumper?"



The Meet with Lord Derby's staghounds



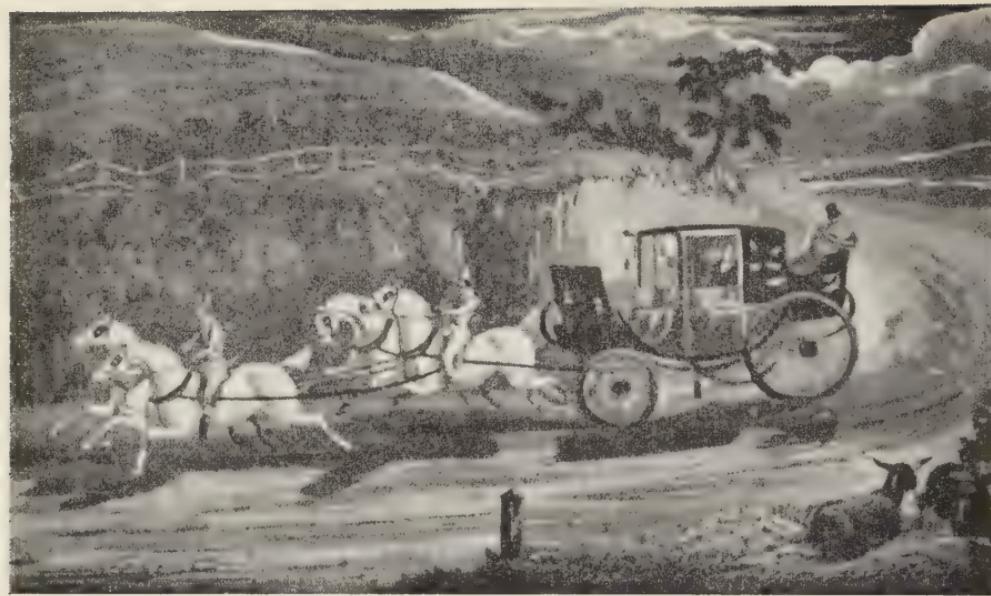
“Stand and Deliver.”



Mytton riding his pet bear



The Oaks Filly



“Light come light go.”



Mytton on Baronet clears nine yards of water



“Damn these hiccups!”



“A hell of a row in a hell.”



“Well done, Neck or Nothing!”



Myton swims the Severn



The tandem night ride



Heron shooting



The Squire-trap



The Shavington Day

until morning. He sent to Oswestry for twenty pairs of skates and insisted that his servants try them out, although many of them had never been on the ice before and they spent an uncomfortable morning sprawling this way and that for their master's amusement. When they had all gone away exhausted he had a number of rats turned out before his terriers to see how quickly they could dispose of the vermin on such a slippery surface. Caroline watched these inane preoccupations uneasily. She knew only too well the tenuous hold she had upon him, and it seemed, as spring approached, that he was restless and out of temper, like a balky horse. There were ominous signs that he was returning to the brandy bottle; John was mildly surprised to find that it came back to his hand like an old friend, but in his heart he knew the reason.

He was bored. The old acquaintances who watched and waited, the cynical sporty boys and tavern girls, had been right; they had seen too much of life to suppose that a good wife could for long be a substitute for self-indulgence. Caroline suspected but she kept her counsel and lived her life as usual, welcoming their friends, caring for the children and administering the household, but when she looked out to the years ahead she needed to grasp her courage with both hands. John was leaving her alone for longer periods now, riding off with his cronies and staying away until far into the night. The image of a sober, respectable father and husband, ex-High Sheriff and military hero, was being overlaid by that earlier reality of Mad Jack Mytton who rode his horses over every impossible fence in Shropshire and drank himself stupid every day.

Caroline pretended not to notice and refrained from scolding, but she was bitterly disappointed. What did he want? Why was he not content with his fine family, his great name, his possessions? She watched furiously his silly exploits. He was like a child, now organising a mock hunt with all his servants mounted upon ponies, donkeys and mules, now wagering upon a race between carthorses, or upsetting his trainer into a stream when they were both out shooting.

It was all so pointless and futile, when men with lesser resources than his were setting out to improve their homes, embellish their parks or acquire greater skill in husbandry. She could not compete with the terrible restlessness that had overtaken him; there were days when nothing would satisfy him, he would have his horse saddled and return after a few minutes, shouting for the team to be put to the phaeton. He would go out shooting and come back soaked to the skin, having decided to wade in the lake after herons. There was no pleasure anywhere for him and Caroline could only guess at the black ennui which engulfed his soul. She tried desperately to tempt him back to her, but if she wanted to arrange parties and diversions for him he would not suffer her to do so. He did not care for the staid, respectable County; he preferred to gallop off to Birmingham with Beardsworth.

Shropshire was too small to hold him. His exuberance and vitality overflowed its boundaries and he was everywhere, galloping, careering headlong in his carriage, running like a hunted stag over his fields and meadows. He ought to have smashed himself up many times over and a less lucky man would have been killed, for perhaps, unconsciously, he was courting death; a broken neck in the hunting field would have been a suitable end to his turbulent life but that luxury was denied him, and he lived on feverishly, becoming more and more estranged from Caroline who wept for him, and from his friends who were beginning to regret their misplaced trust.

He drank to smother his black, terrifying moods and only succeeded in making them worse, but the bad companions of former days welcomed him with open arms and he planned with them a wonderful future full of pleasure. The days were not long enough for all he meant to do, the hunting, racing, gambling, whoring, drinking, and the great feasts with all his friends around him and none of Caroline's stuffy acquaintances. The contemplation of these delights often dispelled his misery and he was usually the most jovial member of the dinner parties at Halston, arranging dog fights in the drawing room, riding about on the back of his bear, and unkennelling the hounds so that the whole

drunken crew could pursue them as they fancied. After these affairs the countryside would be strewn with Squire Mytton's guests, sleeping it off under hedges and in ditches.

John's term as High Sheriff had ended and during 1824 he contrived to shed the last remnants of respectability and emerge into the limelight of notoriety. Life was difficult for Caroline and old Mrs Mytton, still in touch with their friends but afraid to invite them to Halston when John was at home, for he had embarrassing ways with guests who bored him. In summer, when the windows of the dining room were open, he would suddenly leave the table, climb out over the sill and disappear across the fields without a word, not to return until the guests had departed.

Caroline's existence was confined to Halston, for although she begged to be taken to London, or even to Shrewsbury for the Hunt ball, John was as niggardly with her as he had been with Harriet Emma. Presently her third pregnancy gave him a better excuse for refusing her pleading and he rode off to his own amusements with a clear conscience. Poor Caroline would have loved to attend the Assembly and see what was modishly worn nowadays, but instead she must wait her turn for *The Lady's Magazine* to learn that women's waists had now descended to their natural level where fashion dictated that they should be constrained and corseted into an unnatural circumference.

The free-flowing Classical lines had given way to formalised Romanticism. The dandies were wearing huge padded sleeves *en gigot*, and stays were worn by all fashion-conscious males to improve the fit of their close-coats; even in the hunting field they were obliged to keep their figures in shape "by an odious whale-boned thing called a hunting belt" which "metamorphosed a most respectable stomach into the prototype of an hour glass".

The beaux and their ladies were looking less and less to the Court now for approbation and patronage. The King was old and gouty and it was a long time since he had leaned upon Brummell as the arbiter of fashion, and paraded among the Oriental wonders of the Pavilion in the robes of a mandarin.

Court life was dull and almost respectable, infinitely remote from the outside world where a growing industrialism was no longer dependent upon a few skilled craftsmen but on a vast number of workers, little more than slaves to their machines. They had no vote and no prospect of controlling their own future, and their rights were being set aside for the sake of profit, but the Tory Government, intent upon survival, steered its safe, negative policies past a resentful Opposition.

Prince Pückler Muskau remarked, "Aristocracy unquestionably holds a most noble station, but without great moderation, without great concessions made to reason and the spirit of the times they will perhaps not occupy this station half a century longer."

The Prince admittedly was biased, as he had been thwarted in his attempts to marry a rich, well-born lady, but such prophetic words from a visitor to England demonstrated how isolated the Court and Government were from reality. Many people believed that the country's greatness was vanishing into a limbo of complacency, ignorance and stupidity, and that it could only be restored by bloodshed and revolution; they watched sullenly as the Lords rode in ermine to the opening of Parliament, aware of the futility of a system by which Old Sarum could return two members and Manchester none. They absorbed the writings of Byron and the Lake poets, and the viciously critical articles in the reviews. They waited, as the British have always done in a crisis. Meanwhile, the squires shrugged off the uneasy rumours and returned to their estates for the winter shooting, including the Duke of Wellington, who informed Lady Shelley that he "was out for three hours the other day about the hedges at Stratfield Saye and shot fourteen rabbits, twelve hares, two pheasants and a partridge."

The Duke was not alone in ignoring the signs which led many local authorities to issue stand-by orders to the yeomanry.

Princess Lieven had written to Metternich in the summer of 1823, "Never was a country so happy and peaceful as England at this moment. The lower classes live in plenty. Trade flourishes. The nobility wallow in the lap of luxury. If anyone thought of

complaining people would laugh in his face. I have lived in this country for 11 years, and for the first time I hear no grumbling . . . The National Debt is being reduced, taxes are being abolished. Bread is cheap."

Princess Lieven spent much of her time at Royal Lodge, Windsor, and her privileged position at the heart of that overheated, fantastic, grandiose household did not permit her to look out of the window. Had she been able to do so she might have observed that the echoes of Peterloo had not died away, that small children were working cruel hours in mines and factories, the drift from the land had not been halted and there was little justice for the poor.

In the remoter country places like Halston these things did not cause much uneasiness. The strike of the North Wales colliers had been broken without more incident, and most of the trouble in quiet, prosperous Shrewsbury was caused by Squire Mytton. It was a great joke to let a fox loose in the hotel lounge with a brace of dogs to chase it, and to place a red-hot coal in the pocket of the gentleman who seemed to be taking up too much of the fire; the townsfolk were continually sending up bills for damage which John instructed his steward to pay without question.

In January 1825 Caroline gave birth to her second son, Charles Orville. John was no longer interested in the Halston nursery and he found his wife's yearly pregnancies distasteful; there were numerous affairs with other women which he did not attempt to deny as his quarrels with her grew more frequent.

The evil rumours, smothered at the beginning of their life together, now started up again, causing great distress both to old Mrs Mytton and to her daughter-in-law. Caroline bore his heartlessness and cruelty with forbearance, and because she may have seen the reason for his behaviour remained loyal to him, allowing his faults and defending his infidelities. She was faithful and loving, and an ordinary man would have lived with her happily and peacefully to the end of his life. But John was not ordinary. The freakish circumstances of his birth and upbringing, during which he had been hopelessly spoiled by his devoted mother,

made it unlikely that he could ever leave his world where he was all important and all sufficient; he could not deny himself anything even to save the land he loved so much. Caroline had clasped his hand in the darkness and led him almost to the end of the dreadful path, but he stumbled and loosed his hold and she could not save him again.

His crazy pranks and drunken fooling were forgiven over and over again, mostly for her sake; yet when John decided to be sober he remained a most delightful companion and his friends were usually willing to give him another chance; at the end of 1824 he was discussing hunting prospects with other country gentlemen while they were making changes and improvements in their packs. "Activity is the first requisite in a huntsman to a pack of hounds," says the Hunting Directory, and there were too many followers demanding a hard, fast, exciting sport to allow any progressive Master to lag behind his neighbours.

Nearer London, and in the Shires, the fashionable packs were supporting an increasing number of fops, dandies and exquisites who came out merely to be seen in a coat of the latest cut, thrusters who over-rode hounds, and gentlemen of dubious ancestry who were there in a way of business. Since everyone who owned a horse fancied himself as a dealer there was a good deal of quiet haggling at covert side, or presently in the inn-parlour over a tankard of mulled ale.

For the hunting snob, however, there was only one place in England worthy of attention and that was the town of Melton Mowbray, situated within easy reach of three celebrated packs, the Quorn, the Belvoir and the Cottesmore. If one's affairs were properly organised it was possible to hunt six days a week in some of the fairest country in the world, and accompanied by as many titles as one would wish. Apperley, who dearly loved an aristocrat, spent a good deal of time in Leicestershire after *The Sporting Magazine* had given him carte blanche, and became so enraptured with what he saw that he tended to overlook the humbler packs who showed as good sport as the grand Midlands, and whose followers were better behaved.

However, Apperley, The Druid and Delmé Radcliffe all pronounced that foxhunting was doomed and would not outlast the rising generation. Their forebodings were based almost entirely upon economics. The railways, in addition to cutting up the countryside, were encouraging people to go to the large towns and spend their money there, so that less and less would be available for the field sports which "bound country gentlemen to their homes". The threat did not materialise; one hundred and forty years later the railways themselves seem unlikely to survive another generation while fox-hunting is still firmly entrenched despite many efforts to outlaw it.

Of the three packs within John's reach he always preferred the Albrighton, and he had many splendid runs with it, usually with some piece of bravado to liven up the occasion. Rivers and lakes had a fascination for him, and since he could not swim he was always in and out of the water without the slightest regard for his own comfort or safety. Once he nearly drowned his horse, a fine mare called *Cara Sposa*, when he plunged into the swollen river Severn on her back. She was carried downstream and swept against the opposite bank which was too soft and yielding to permit her to gain a foothold. The prompt action of the whipper-in saved them, for he leaned over and dragged John out by the collar. *Cara Sposa*, relieved of his weight, was then able to scramble up.

When he was hunting his own hounds within the confines of Halston he kept up the old custom of providing a meal for his followers, and since this was apt to be taken wherever the fancy took him the servants must have had a most difficult and trying time. A splendid picnic was washed down with champagne and port, and the rest of the day's sport was somewhat erratic, to end at Halston with a party where the wine flowed and a great deal of money was wagered in games of hazard.

He was a crazy gambler, winning and losing frighteningly large sums, yet any hint of cheating enraged him. After Warwick races in 1824 he and a group of friends had visited the town's gaming house to play *rouge et noir*, and presently he suspected that they

were being rooked. He smashed the table, started a free fight and turned the place into a shambles, afterwards using his influence as an ex-Sheriff to ensure that the owner did not get a penny in compensation.

Yet on occasions John broke the law quite flagrantly and was able to get away with it. During Chester race week he hired a room illegally to play hazard. The mayor got wind of it and arrived with a posse of constables, only to find Squire Mytton an innocent bystander, quietly leaning up against the wall with his arms folded. He had swept his considerable winnings into his top hat at the first alarm, and had placed it upon his head.

When he attained his twenty-eighth birthday in September 1825, his life had settled down into a kind of routine which bore no resemblance to the ordered, deliberate existence of the previous years. Two-thirds of his life were already over; the era which had bred him and others like him was drawing to a close, measuring out its span in time to the bronchitic, laboured breathing of the old King at Windsor.

“Our acquaintance Prinny was at the races each day,” Creevey had observed in June, 1824. “And tho’ in health he appears perfect yet he had all the appearance of a slang leg.”

Creevey knew, as the other gossips did, that the King spent most of his time in bed, where he was given massive doses of laudanum to ease the pain in his legs, and bled often. Lady Conyngham sat by his pillow, bored to distraction yet unwilling to leave him in case there should be others eager to seize the place she had vacated. The sick, unhappy man had retained sufficient of his good taste and love of scholarship to put in hand an ambitious scheme for restoring Windsor Castle, and to endow the British Museum with the splendid library which had been formed by his father, but his physicians declared that, “It was all horses, horses, with him, by night and by day, to the very last.”

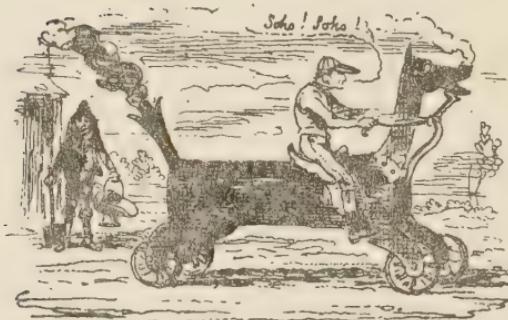
As soon as he was able to hobble he was down consulting with his factor Jack Ratford, that shrewd, able horse-coper who had been recommended to the King by the Duke of Queensberry, Old Q himself, after Jack had left his service as pad-groom.

The King, like John, was spending money like water on racing stock, not all of it sound, but if a horse took his fancy the price did not matter. When Sam Chifney bid up to eleven hundred pounds for Pucelle at Lord Henry Fitzroy's sale he was passed the word that the King was against him, and determined to have the mare at any cost. This extravagance was greatly resented by many of his subjects, and he was unable to appear in public without being greeted with jeers and shouts of "Damn the King! The Duke of York for ever!"

He often wept with humiliation, and then he would turn to the cold-hearted Lady Conyngham for the solace which was more imaginary than real. He weighed twenty-three stone, and the days were long gone when Mat Milton the dealer would come into the stable-yard next to Carlton House with a hack or hunter for him to try. He remembered their names, Asparagus, Tobacco-Stopper, Currible and Tiger who was light below the knee, yet carried him to covert so bravely on the days when he hunted with John Truman Villebois and the Hampshire. But now he was old, and sick, and more than a reign was to end with his passing, for on September 20th, 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway was opened.



CHAPTER TWELVE



A Fiery Steed ~

WHEN it became practicable to use machines for transport, and man had discovered a faster and more durable form of travel than a horse and carriage, the whole face of society was changed. George Stephenson was soon to demonstrate the capabilities of a steam-driven locomotive suitable for passenger and freight haulage, and The Rocket proved at the Rainhill trials that the day of the horse was over, yet this tremendous revolution was accepted and absorbed with hardly a ripple disturbing the calm surface of national existence.

The squires were unable to see the railways as any more than threats to their hunting, and John never thought about them at all since Shropshire was out of range of the great trunk lines.

He was far more interested in The Wonder, a new coach running on the Shrewsbury-London road and timed to make the journey in a single day. It was the forerunner of many which made British travel the envy of Europe for about twenty years, until the railways took over and long-distance horse-drawn vehicles ceased to be a paying proposition. It was perhaps ironical that the golden age of coaching should have commenced at the same time

as the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, but people were beginning to demand a high standard of comfort and speed and were willing to pay for it, so that better horses, more efficient coachmen and superior vehicles had to be provided. The earlier forms of public transport had been exceptionally bad; the Mails had a fine reputation but they were insufficient to meet the growing need for improvement.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century posting inns were competing with each other for trade and establishing good names for cleanliness, service and food, but the coming of the railways put many of them out of business and they deteriorated into dirty ale-houses upon forgotten roads, catering for country yokels and an occasional pedlar, but in the mid-thirties when coaching was at its height the great terminal yards were a splendid sight.

Driving a stage was hard, unglamorous, difficult work, and a professional had to be tough and strong. Some were gentry who took an enormous pride in their work, like Sir Vincent Cotton who drove *The Brighton Age*. Apperley, too, had been a regular driver and so had John Herring, the sporting artist.

Horsing these new fast coaches was a constant worry to the coachmasters, for it was no longer possible to buy cheap and underfeed. Bloodstock, filled with good oats, was necessary in a furiously competitive trade and there was no end to the demand. William Chapman, who worked from five yards including the famous Spread Eagle in Gracechurch Street, reckoned on having thirteen hundred animals in his stables, while at Hounslow, an important centre for West Country traffic, there was housing for over two thousand. Before a discerning travelling public began to ask for better conditions, the lot of a coach-horse was a wretched one, but in the years following Waterloo every master was obliged to see that his beasts were well-found.

Often a team possessed all the vices under the sun, as well as hard mouths, blindness and blemished knees which would not be tolerated in a gentleman's stable, and the fact that such misfits could be turned into a workmanlike partnership capable of

dragging the heavy coaches over difficult ground reflected the greatest credit on the drivers. Many of them were so successful with refractory horses that some private owners used to send their delinquents to be steadied by a spell in the public coaches.

There was now an infinite variety of private vehicles, ranging from the newly designed pony phaeton which had been built specially for the King, to the charming and elegant Tilbury gig. A gentleman's coach-house might contain a travelling chaise, a couple of gigs, a whiskey, and perhaps, if there was a sporting son of the house, a high slung sulky drawn by a fast Norfolk trotter, the ancestor of the modern Hackney.

Trotting matches were fashionable, and much money was wagered on their outcome. In April, 1824, the Maid of the Mill trotted twenty-eight miles in two successive hours over Sunbury Common, and Squire Osbaldeston's Tom Thumb, who was only 14.2 hands, ran sixteen and a half miles in one hour, but any trotter worth his salt was expected to do a ten-mile stage in sixty minutes and arrive unblown at the end of it.

Perhaps the ladies benefited most from the popularity of driving. It must have been delightful to whisk around behind a pair of blood horses in a curricle, or, like Jane Austen, be squired into a "bewitching phaeton and four".

A Mr Evelyn had asked to be allowed to drive the novelist in this splendid vehicle, "which," she said, "to confess my frailty, I have a great desire to go out in."

And no wonder.

It was considered correct for a lady to handle a high-spirited horse when it was drawing her equipage, but not for that same lady to appear mounted upon the beast in the hunting field. As it was, women became skilful whips apparently because it was one way in which they could hold their own with the men, and old sporting prints reveal how charming they looked in their bonnets and pelisses. Sometimes, in addition to handling the reins, they held aloft delicate parasols in case the sun should spoil their complexions. We do not know whether Harriet Emma or Caroline were permitted their own conveyances; John had caused

the former to lose her nerve by his reckless driving, and he became so suspicious and jealous during his last years with Caroline that he hardly permitted her to leave the house at all.

Apparently he did not attempt to take up the ribbons on *The Wonder* when that remarkable vehicle came on the road, surprisingly in view of his passion for driving, but he had a serious accident in 1826 which may have put him off doing so.

He was coming home in a coach from Wolverhampton races with a number of other people when he became impatient of the speed it was travelling, got up on the box and gave the offside horse a slash with the whip just as they were going round a corner. The acceleration proved too much for the coach, which overturned, and threw the passengers out over a hedge into a field. One of them, young Mr Boycott of Rudge Hall, was so seriously injured that he died later. Although John was obviously to blame for this appalling affair, no action seems to have been taken against him. Perhaps there was a general unwillingness to be the first to challenge the Squire of Halston, but the feelings of the Boycott family may be imagined.

As the days passed he became less responsible for anything he did and more dependent upon the brandy for comfort and stimulation, and it was unfortunate from Caroline's point of view that Apperley turned up again in January of 1826 to encourage John in his wildness; she found, as Harriet Emma had done, that the decanters in the library and billiard room were far too frequently replenished.

Apperley was then at the height of his career as a sporting journalist. He was on a tour of the Midlands, and having taken coach at Oxford presently found himself in Shropshire. At Shrewsbury he went out with Sir Bellingham Graham, and remarked rather plaintively on January 7th, "I mounted Mr. Mytton on this day (who had no horses at Shrewsbury) and never saw my mare for five days afterwards; but this is a trifle among old friends and she was very well taken care of at Halston."

He had stabled his horses with John while he went into Flintshire to have a look at the country there. He returned at

the end of February and was informed by the groom that it was just as well he had returned "as the Squire would have been on top of some of them before another day was over".

Apperley knew what that would have meant; he understood John only too well. Three days later he was persuaded to attend a meet of his host's hounds, and found to his astonishment that the Master, the three whippers-in, and Tom Whitehouse the jockey were all mounted upon the best horses in the stable, in spite of the stud-groom's protests. They ran a bag-fox. Apperley was scarcely able to trace the words in his diary, orthodox soul that he was, but he had to admit that the chase was an exciting one and that the multi-racial pack hunted well.

There were the usual stops for food and drink; another fox was released and this time the pace was so cracking that Apperley wondered how long the horses would stand it. Fortunately a hare got up "which every hound followed into Sir Edward Kynaston's plantations, and thus ended the morning's sport. We had a party to dinner, and the evening's case was by no means slow."

He had sized up the situation, and grieved at what he saw. He felt certain that John was destined for an early grave and wrote, "I am sorry to say, I am almost old enough to be his father; nevertheless, unless he minds what he is at, I shall see him out. If I do (as I have written my own) I will also write his epitaph . . .

"Here lies John Mytton, his short career is past.
The pace was quick and therefore could not last.
From end to end he went on errant burst,
Determined to be nowhere, or be first."

This earnest piece of doggerel is touching, for Apperley was sincere in his sympathy for the Myttons, and Caroline had confided to him how much she loved her husband in spite of all his faults. She never for a moment considered abandoning him, and it was not until much later, when circumstances had altered, that she was forced for her own safety to leave Halston. Women

were part of their husband's chattels, and only the lucky ones managed to escape entirely from the domination of a cruel or dissipated partner. Divorce was difficult and extremely expensive, as the King himself had found, and only for the rich and privileged. Lesser folk had to be content with one another as best they could, and the code of behaviour which bound up the semi-aristocratic landed gentry would not permit of separation except under conditions of greatest hardship, and then every effort would be made to bring the two sides together again.

In April, 1826, Caroline bore another son which John insisted should be named after his favourite race-horse, and so he was solemnly baptized Euphrates Henry. This little boy, and his elder brother Charles Orville, were destined to die within a month of each other eight years later, but John had already been bereaved in March by the death of his sister Rebecca Lethbridge. Old Mrs Mytton, surrounded by a growing family of grandchildren, grieved a little at the loss of her daughter, but it was a long time since she had run off with her Somersetshire lover and memories grew dim, and there was not much left now of the hopeful promise of thirty years ago when John and his sister were children.

He was recovering from a riding accident, of which the *Annal of Sport* recorded, "We regret to note that this genuine sportsman and ornament of the turf met with a severe accident, late in April. In riding a steeplechase, his horse fell, and rolling over him, broke six of his ribs. Notwithstanding this, Mr Mytton expressed his determination to be present at the races at Chester, even though he should be brought on a litter. There is no spunk like a British sportsman's, after all."

Presumably John wished to be there to see Euphrates run in the race for the King's Plate, which he won, and together with Flexible and Longwaist carried off half a dozen gold cups that year. Tom Whitehouse was on top of his form, but John was obliged to defend his jockey's reputation after allegations of dishonesty.

He wrote a dignified letter to the *Salopian Journal*.

"Having lately heard it asserted, as the general opinion, that

the defeat of my celebrated horse Longwaist may be attributed to the dishonesty of his rider, I feel called upon, as his owner, to express my firm and unshaken confidence in his integrity, till now unimpeached, and in truth unimpeachable.

“Nothing but anxiety to rescue the fame and character of a highly valued servant, and deservedly admirable rider, would induce me to trespass upon your valuable columns, but feeling that the character of Whitehouse is as unspotted, and as valuable to himself as that of the highest of our nobles is to him, I cannot resist making my confidence in his worth and integrity thus public.”

He was presumably justified in his assertions, for he detested cheating in any form and Whitehouse knew it; if John had thought him guilty of such malpractice he would have dismissed him immediately. It is perhaps interesting to notice that John’s own honesty was not called into question; most people knew that he rarely, if ever, bet on his own horses.

But although the Halston sideboard was handsomely decorated with gold plate, and he enjoyed the cheers of his supporters when his colours were first past the post, racing bored him as all other occupations did and he continued his aimless search for new diversions. Now that Apperley had gone there was no halfway house for him between Halston and Chillington, and there were days when he could scarcely shake off his lethargy sufficiently to drive in the phaeton.

He remarked, “I own Longwaist, fifty other thoroughbreds, a few hunters, a few hounds, course a little, and sometimes fight a main of cocks.” But often he sat in his chair like an old man with a bottle of port or brandy beside him and it seemed as though there was nothing left in the world for him to enjoy. Even the gay pattern of huntsmen and hounds moving across the coloured fields could not hold his attention for longer than it took to draw a fox and run him to the next covert.

A trip to London might have livened him up, but Mrs Arbuthnot wrote to Lady Shelley that although London was very pleasant it was not particularly gay, and they were nearly

reduced to charitable balls. Prince Pückler Muskau remarked that, "London is now so dead to elegance and fashion that one hardly meets an equipage, and nothing remains of the 'Beau Monde' but a few ambassadors."

However, the arrival of Euphrates Henry had stimulated a sudden new interest in his family. The children adored his visits to the nursery, for he was jolly and noisy and usually had his pockets stuffed full of oranges. Sometimes he wore his scarlet hunting coat and was followed by a brace of hounds, then he would give them the View Hulloo until the rafters rang and the babies began to cry. Within their small uncomplicated world he felt secure, for they were but little animals and reacted to him much as his dogs and hunters did. But presently he tired of their company and slouched off with Beardsworth; soon the children stopped asking for him.

Caroline needed all her forbearance and courage as she watched the gradual dissolution of her husband and came to the bitter realisation that their good life together was over. She had been warned, of course, that it was likely to happen, and yet, with youthful optimism, she had been convinced that he would be easy to handle. The charm and vitality which had so delighted her were now seldom revealed, and days would pass when he did not speak except to abuse her.

"If you had a daughter marriageable, Mr Apperley, would you like to see her married to Mr Mytton?"

Lady Charlotte Giffard's words echoed in Caroline's heart now that she was powerless to help him, and could only listen to his drunken raving and silently supervise the servants who cleared up the spilled wine and helped their master to bed after the raffish company he had brought home had somehow found their horses and vehicles and departed. She took comfort from the fact that however long his drinking bouts lasted he always came home after them to lay his head in her lap and weep in anguished contrition, and that sometimes the quiet sober moments were there too, when he mounted Baronet and set off for a day's hunting, or fished peacefully in the lake while his terriers dozed beside him in the

sun. The children grew up in these contrasts of darkness and light, their father's unpredictable moods setting the tempo of life for them. They adored him as all animals and young things did, setting up their innocence against his dark despair and the shadows of the future.

Caroline was desperately worried about money; the estates and John's extravagance were eating up the income and she could see the time when there would be nothing left. Many people had come to the conclusion that Jack Mytton was finished, and that it was only a matter of time before Halston was sold over the heads of his wife and family and he departed into a debtor's prison.

The credit extended to him had now stretched over many years; like King George in earlier days he now owed far more than he could ever repay and there was no Caroline of Brunswick to come to his rescue. He was more or less oblivious of his financial position. A thousand pounds one way or the other meant nothing to him; to the end of his life he never realised the extent of his debts and so he continued to purchase bag-foxes from London, hounds, horses, terriers and hunting kit. No one knew how much he spent on brandy and port-wine, and only Caroline knew how much he drank. She got sympathy but little practical help. Although her brother Walter was John's greatest friend she hardly expected him to be of financial assistance, but he did what he could to try and keep John off the drink and she was grateful for that.

Longueville the agent became so seriously alarmed when his master contemplated selling one of the family estates at Shrewsbury to raise some ready cash, that he called upon Apperley to try and make him see sense.

"I have reason to believe," he remarked, "that you can say as much to Mr Mytton as any man."

Apperley promised to do what he could, and waited for a propitious moment to state, casually, that he had overheard Longueville suggest that if John were content to live on six thousand pounds a year for the next six years, there would be no need to sell the estate, and he would have paid off his debts.

"I fancy," Apperley wrote, "that I see the form and features of my old friend, with the manner in which he received and replied to the flattering proposition.

"Lolling back in his carriage, which was going at its usual pace, and picking a hole in his chin, as he was always wont to do when anything particular occupied his thoughts, he uttered not a syllable for the space of some minutes; when, suddenly changing his position, as if arousing from a deep reverie, he exclaimed with vehemence, 'You may tell Longueville to keep his advice to himself, for I would not give a d——n to live on six thousand a year.'"

He would not be reasoned with and the most logical arguments failed to move him; other branches of the Mytton family regarded this profligacy with the greatest disfavour and one relation pleaded with him not to sell an estate because it had been in the family so long.

"How long?" John asked.

"About five hundred years."

"The devil it has! Then it is high time it should go out of it."

What on earth were the thwarted uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces to make of such irresponsible behaviour? Threats, cajolament, pleading, all failed to move him, and he was no more to be contained in the circle of convention than a whirlwind.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN



THE Duke of York died on January 6th, 1827, and Princess Victoria moved one step nearer the throne. Clarence, as Heir Presumptive, now possessed £9,000 a year more in allowances, and Creevey remarked on the homage paid to him at his brother's funeral, but the House of Hanover was becoming more and more unpopular as the situation in the rural areas deteriorated. There had been a succession of bad harvests for which the King and the Government severally were blamed, and the various Select Committees appointed by Parliament to look into agricultural conditions were entirely ineffective.

For most of the time the King was stupid and half-unconscious from the effects of laudanum, and it was almost impossible to get any sense out of him. He hardly ever showed himself in public, but Mrs Arbuthnot recorded at the beginning of December, 1826, "I went to Drury Lane to see the King . . . he looked, I thought,

very cross and much bored, and fatter than ever, quite enormous."

Two months later she wrote, "I don't think he cares a straw for Lady Conyngham, and tho' she is in the house he scarcely ever sees her."

George, at sixty-five, had ceased actively to care for anyone, although the irrepressible Creevey declared, "It is said Prinny fell head over ears in love with Miss Chester the actress, but two nights he was at the play, and that Lady Conyngham has been made very uneasy, which of course is all my eye. . . ."

The last years of a dying monarch were being spun out in an atmosphere of unrest and perplexity, and honest folk were at a loss to understand why the working man should be dissatisfied with his lot when it had been ordained by God. Sweat and labour were dignified, and if factory conditions were not ideal it was all the poor could expect, along with infant mortality, starvation and disease; but William Cobbett was about to publish a powerful protest against the cynical exploitation of the working classes, and against Government oppression.

"It is the vermin who live upon the taxes, and not those who work to raise them, that we want to get rid of," he declared in *Rural Rides*, advocating at the same time a return to the old, merry England, "Room for us all and plenty to eat and drink."

The Tories were not greatly exercised by the fact that so many people were without voice or representation, and they were supported by the Established Church who could not forget the frantic revolutionaries who had overthrown law and order in France and brought an atheistical government into power. Nevertheless, the campaign for reform continued, and there were speeches, heckling and violence.

Someone fired a blunderbuss through the window of the Countess of Munster's country house while she was distributing Christmas presents to her children, and "nobody," said Prince Pückler Muskau, "can guess who was the perpetrator of this horrid deed." The squires, when they met on the bench as justices, or in each other's houses, discussed the changing, shifting pattern of

events and the dangerous opinions of wicked men. Some may have instinctively realised that the England their fathers knew had gone for ever, yet they were determined to oppose any change which would curtail their already declining power. It was a time for men to stand and take stock and to reassess their lives in the light of new political and social ideas; if it had been possible for Mr Owen to persuade John to such a course he could well have avoided the disasters which later befell the Mytton family.

The clergyman stood immediately outside his patron's world and could see clearly into it. He was profoundly disturbed, and there were many nights when he lay sleepless wondering what else he could have done to protect his old pupil. His share in John's rearing was a peculiarly personal one, and even now he felt that in some ways he was a substitute for a father. But he did not possess a parent's privileges and he could only hope that his prayers were listened to.

He liked to sit beneath the oak trees in the park and gaze at the great mellow mansion as it lay in the sunlight. He sighed, thinking of the happy days he had passed there and wondering how much longer he would be able to enjoy its quiet peace. He knew there was great unrest in the land and that his patron was incapable of halting the course of self-destruction upon which he had now embarked. These things seemed to Mr Owen to be beyond reason when life could be led so nobly in that beautiful country, among the great trees and green copses and singing streams, where even the change-ringing on a Sunday was a source of wonder to Continental visitors.

As a serious student of the Stud Book he knew, too, that it was a golden age for anyone who had charge of a horse or a hound, for the value of good breeding had become recognised and the wealthy spared no expense to improve their stock. Assheton Smith's new stables at Tedworth had taken two years to build and were the very last word in comfort and convenience, while John's racing establishment was equally well maintained. He loved to take his friends there to admire the glossy, handsome thoroughbreds; he watched the horses lovingly and taught them tricks,

they would, of course, do anything for him. Even the hard-boiled Apperley was terrified at some of the risks John took, and he could not bear to watch as he lay on the ground between the feet of one of his fillies, playing with her tail and tickling her about the legs. She suffered him to do this with great patience, and when it was done he went next door and larked about with the horse Oswestry, causing the trainer to shake his head.

“He will do that once too often!” he remarked to Apperley.

“Right, Mr. Dilly, and good tempered as your Oaks filly is if she once gets alarmed she will knock out Mr Mytton’s brains.”

His filly did not win the Oaks, nor did any of his horses ever come first in a Classic. When Beardsworth’s colt, Birmingham, won the St Leger in 1830 circumstances had forced him to turn over the management of his racing stable to his former partner.

In 1828 there were only seven horses in training, and this may have been due to the insistence of Walter Giffard who tried to keep a curb on John’s expenditure for his sister’s sake. It was a great relief to Caroline that in spite of everything he remained her husband’s friend and was still able to coax him into the saddle for a day’s hunting, but the visits to Chillington were less frequent now and lacked their former zest. Apperley’s account of the evening when John had driven the gig over a hedge rather than be late for dinner with his mother-in-law had passed into legend; now he was away from home so much that they were saying in the pubs that he was dead, but every now and then he would arrive in Shrewsbury like a whirlwind, scattering destruction and guineas impartially.

Caroline knew that he was unfaithful; rumours of his numerous liaisons leaked back to Halston heaping further humiliation upon that unfortunate household, but the ladies who ministered to his sexual pleasures were all, as Apperley put it, “in the market”. “Indeed,” he tells us, “I never heard of his laying siege to the virtue of any woman.”

His affairs were successfully terminated cash transactions, but there was at least one occasion when this approach failed. After a celebrated singer had appeared at an Oswestry music

festive John, who had only seen her for half an hour, sent round a note asking for an interview the next day, and a cheque for five hundred pounds drawn upon his bank.

Said Apperley, unchivalrously, "The lady—who all the world knows would have been quite satisfied with a five pound note—having luckily never heard either of John Mytton or the Oswestry bank—returned the note and its valuable contents."

His elephantine sense of humour found satisfaction in handcuffing two girls together one evening after the Chester races, under the pretence of giving them bracelets. Later on, drunk as a lord, he lurched through the city streets with his arms round them both. We do not know who his companions were during this most disastrous period of his life. Certainly Beardsworth was there, exacting the toll of friendship, and others who had their wits about them when the Squire's were fuddled with brandy saw that their own pockets were lined at the expense of his. Such furious extravagance was known throughout the county and could have become a focus of dissent for those whose business it was to stir up trouble, but somehow his disarming naivety broke down all reserve and those who came to reproach often ended by drinking with him.

He recovered his senses sufficiently to take part in a great sporting occasion, the last time he was to ride across his native county, at the end of the 1828-29 hunting season. Sir Harry Mainwaring of Cheshire, Mr Edward Smythe of Shropshire, and Mr Wicksted of Stafford had each agreed to a test of stamina, nose and courage between their respective foxhounds, each pack choosing six couples for this trial, and they were to meet at Shavington Hall near Whitchurch, the seat of Lord Kilmorey, himself a great patron of hunting.

The first fighters of all three counties converged upon the place, attracted by the originality of the contest, and it was supposed, said Apperley, "that there were considerably more than a thousand horsemen in the field, about seven hundred of them clad in scarlet". John had arrived on the previous evening with a couple of friends, dined at Whitchurch, then drove over

to the neighbouring village of Wrenbury where hounds were quartered. He found a cockfight in progress which held his attention for an hour or so. Afterwards on his return to Whitchurch he had a session with a commercial traveller who was just going to bed when the Squire came in. Together they drank contentedly into the small hours.

Hounds met at Shavington Hall the following morning at eleven o'clock, and the splendid park was an ideal setting for it. There was plenty of room for all the carriages, gigs and phaetons which had brought the ladies, and the field sat on their well-groomed, prick-eared mounts waiting until noon when hounds would draw the first covert. John had brought his best hunter with him, the Hit-or-Miss mare who had greatly impressed Sir Bellingham Graham during a run of an hour and forty minutes over difficult country, when she had carried her master with such gameness that Sir Bellingham confessed he "had never before been so ridden away from".

Those familiar with John's present mode of life may have been surprised to see him, alert and eager in his fine scarlet coat, mounted upon the handsome mare, but the Shavington Day had been arranged not only as a contest but as a challenge to all sporting men and this he was unable to resist. They moved off at noon and hounds were put into Big Wood, in the park, from which a fox broke almost immediately. The rival huntsmen, concerned only with the success of their own couples, disregarded the enormous field which thundered along behind them, the drumming of hooves almost drowning the voice of horn and hound.

John was in the lead from the beginning and had no intention of relinquishing it. Spurring the mare forward, he urged her into a furious gallop but presently he came to a hair-raising obstacle. It was a sunken fence with a high rail on the take-off side, and for once his prodigious luck deserted him. Perhaps the mare was confused or unsighted by the hallooing, jostling crowd about her, but she fell heavily, throwing John over her shoulder. Stunned and winded, he was unable to move quickly enough to avoid

being jumped on by another horse and the hooves struck him in the head and chest, cutting open his face.

Somehow he got to his feet and remounted the unhappy mare who stood shivering with her head down. His hunting hat lay crushed and useless upon the ground so he left it there, and rode painfully at the back of the field where he was obliged to remain for the rest of the run, for no one was willing to let him through, but presently the fox was lost and the rivals decided to draw again since no evident result had been reached.

This time, after a run of about twelve miles, it could be seen that they were pursuing a vixen in whelp, and hounds were whipped off without tasting blood. The short spring day was far gone and the huntsmen turned their horses' heads towards home without being able to say truthfully which pack had made the better showing. They had had two splendid runs and the Shavington Day ended pleasantly for everyone except John, who jogged his weary mare along the lanes and tracks to Whitchurch where the groom waiting to receive her gazed horrified at his master's appearance, hatless and covered in blood. He dismounted stiffly and sought immediate comfort in a bottle of brandy, but presently he was to look back upon the day with bitter regret, his last great occasion before the glad world crumbled into dust and ashes.

The hunting season was over, and the in-whelp vixens would be left in peace to deliver their cubs and rear them until the young entry were ready for their first outings, but Squire Mytton would never again be seen among them. Nothing would please him that autumn but to drive furiously from one gambling hell to another all over the Midlands. He spent much time with Beardsworth in Birmingham where they gave riotous parties to everyone; money was no object and one of these rowdy affairs cost Beardsworth two thousand pounds.

Every time a Mytton horse won they celebrated; when Beardsworth's daughter got married they celebrated again on a bigger scale and the bride's father nonchalantly threw the young couple a cheque for £50,000 as they drove away for their honeymoon.

John took brief time off from his gambling to attend the Holywell Hunt races, and then he got into a fight.

Three Welsh miners decided that they would like his gold coat buttons and waylaid him. John threw his horse's reins to one of them and set about the other two with such determination that they soon called it quits. He shook their hands, gave them some money and rode off, leaving them standing open-mouthed. But he no longer galloped through Halston's woods with his rag-taggle pack; Baronet, Cara Sposa and his other hunters stood in their stalls or went tamely on exercise with a groom. Halston was home no longer, and Caroline, the children, his mother, Mr Owen, were all forgotten in the new, mad, riotous existence he had found among the gaming tables and the boozing parlours.

Caroline had given birth to her fourth son and last child in April, 1827; Mr Owen had christened him William Harper but John was hardly aware of his existence and nowadays could not answer accurately if anyone asked him how many children he had.

He was claiming in full measure the right which allows a man to go to the devil in his own way, and he felt no remorse or compunction now in severing those ties which bound him to his former life. He had become an alcoholic, and one of the most dangerous and hopeless kind, for he drank brandy and slowly the dreadful disease overwhelmed him until he was finally struck down. He never realised how much the world he knew had altered, that machines were replacing men and animals in increasing numbers and that the steam locomotive Rocket had succeeded in travelling twenty-nine miles an hour at Rainhill in the autumn of 1829; he hardly bothered to glance at the news-sheets and learn that the King was sinking fast, so grotesque and swollen with dropsy as to be almost unrecognisable.

Sir William Knighton had taken the precaution of sending for the Bishop of Chichester although there was no immediate expectation of the King's death, but he expired, suddenly, on June 26th after bursting a blood vessel. The Duke of Clarence, now William IV, was summoned from Bushey; he put on his

admiral's uniform and drove off happily to London escorted by the Duke of Wellington, but unfortunately the news of his brother's demise had not yet reached the ordinary people and they stared in astonishment at the red-faced gentleman with the pineapple-shaped head who bowed and grinned at them from the carriage bearing the royal arms.

The Whigs tried to make party capital by vilifying the late sovereign's memory, but they were a couple of years too late. As far as the general public was concerned King George the Fourth had been dead a long time and they were unable to whip up any violent feelings about him now. The new monarch's reign was only a few months old when the dissatisfaction among agricultural workers exploded into full scale rioting against the introduction of the new threshing machines which threatened their already precarious livelihoods. The trouble spread, and presently sinister menacing letters to farmers, signed with the name of "Swing", preceded acts of violence.

The identity of Swing was never discovered, but he scared the authorities into ordering out the militia and soon, after many people had been arrested, the revolt collapsed. The ringleaders were tried, and either hanged or deported, and their stricken families were left to reflect upon Mr Justice Alderson's retort, "We do not come here to inquire into grievances. We come here to decide law."

King William preferred to leave all matters of state to his Ministers; he took turn about with his coachman and drove round town with Queen Adelaide and the King of Württemberg; he walked alone in the streets and was astonished when a woman recognised him outside White's Club and kissed him soundly on the cheek; he ran his horses at Goodwood and most of them won, which pleased the squires who liked to see Royal patronage of the Turf although the King was far more interested in ships.

And at Doncaster it was Beardsworth's St Leger. Run in a gale, with a thunderstorm brewing and the going like glue, Birmingham was so mud-spattered when he passed the post that he was unrecognisable. At fifteen to one the odds were worth

while, and both John and Beardsworth had backed the horse heavily. The latter posted home as soon as the race was over, catching up with John next day at an inn called The Woolpack where he was drinking beer with several other people. Soon the tankards were being filled with champagne.

John's disease was gradually cutting him off from all normal activities. The terrible moments of despair brought on delusions that everyone was against him, and he imagined them plotting attempts on his life. Then he would leap to his horse and ride away in terror; sometimes in these strange moments of derangement he would attack innocent people for no reason except that he wanted to hurt in order to drive out his dreadful fear, but when he came to his senses afterwards he bitterly regretted what he had done and usually succeeded in putting matters right with money.

After about eight months of aimless wandering he came down to London in September, 1830. Almost as soon as he had arrived he suddenly decided to go back home, and on his way to look in at Chillington as if it were the old times again. The Giffards did not welcome him. Caroline had at last admitted the truth of many of the appalling stories being circulated in the County, and he was shown the door, his persecution complex now dangerously close to mania.

He went on to Halston, dimly aware in his confused mind that among those well-loved surroundings he might find some kind of peace, and Caroline, whatever her feelings may have been, accepted his return with every appearance of pleasure. For a few days he relaxed, and then, perhaps because of a chance remark or thoughtless action, he became once more a drunken lunatic, shouting and fighting with everyone who approached until even the menservants refused to go near him and Caroline locked herself in upstairs with the children.

This went on for a week, until he had drunk himself insensible. The terrified household servants crept from various hiding places and began to clear up the smashed furniture and broken glass; life had barely returned to normal when on October 14th John

savagely attacked his wife. Most fortunately he was prevented from harming her, but this time she did not try to mend matters between them. Taking a few necessities, she fled to Chillington with the six children, for there was no longer safety at Halston for any of them.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN



A FEW weeks later, on November 3rd, a Bill of Complaints was presented in the Chancery Division in the names of Caroline and the children.

It stated, among other things, that ". . . John Mytton wholly gave himself up to a life of the greatest profligacy . . . he has been and still is addicted to excessive drinking in which he had indulged and still habitually indulges in from the time of his rising in the morning until night . . . Caroline Mytton has . . . only remained with him by his repeated assurances of contrition for his past conduct and promises of amendment for the future."

The complaint was granted and Caroline and her family remained at Chillington under her brother's protection. Her friends congratulated her on making the break for she could now

begin a normal existence safe from Mad Jack who, they said, had left Halston shortly afterwards without telling anyone where he was going.

Caroline wept for him, imagining his loneliness and despair; she had been forced to take legal action for the sake of the children but there were too many memories of the laughter and joy of their early life together. In her heart she was sure he wept for her also, and if a miracle brought him back to health and sanity she would immediately return to him.

It had taken John some time to realise that Caroline had left him for good, and in the silence of the empty house, for the servants were too scared to approach him, he nearly lost what reason he possessed. But somehow he managed to pull himself together and make the few necessary arrangements for leaving, thinking now only of getting back to Beardsworth and shaking the Shropshire dust off his feet, perhaps for ever. He did not care much what happened to him, yet in London events were shaping which would bear directly upon his immediate future.

Almost at the same time as Caroline presented her petition the Tory Government fell. Wellington had been its Prime Minister for two and a half years, but he was unpopular and when the Administration was defeated on the question of the Civil List he handed in his resignation. It was reluctantly accepted by the King who was forced to send for the Whig Lord Grey. The Opposition were in power now for the first time in thirty years, but contrary to William's fears they did not show themselves sympathetic to those revolutionary elements which were causing such distress on the Continent. They went quietly ahead with their plans until, on March 1st, 1831, Lord Russell moved for leave to bring in his Reform Bill.

A few weeks later it was thrown out, and Lord Grey asked the King for a dissolution of Parliament in order that there might be a fresh election. The squires had noted the clauses of the Reform Bill with great misgiving, and they began to exert their influence in favour of the Tory candidates, especially in Shropshire where Sir Rowland Hill and Mr Cressett Pelham were standing for

re-election confident of success. They were annoyed, but hardly disturbed, at the advent of Mr William Lloyd of Aston, who opened his committee room under Reform slogans, but they were both amazed and indignant when, on May 6th, an election address appeared in *The Shrewsbury Chronicle* over the name of John Mytton.

He had written. "To the Freeholders of the County of Salop. Gentlemen; Domestic affliction of no slight or common nature has latterly limited my intercourse with you. My wishes for the prosperity of my native County have ever in absence held their usual sway. Having once had the honour of representing your County Town in Parliament; feeling that various avocations precluded the conscientious performance of my duty to my constituents, I declined the Representation at the Dissolution of that Parliament.

"I have no wife—no family—no hounds—no horses—(some will say no steadiness of purpose)—but feeling that I can devote myself to your service, should you honour me with your support and confidence, I venture to offer myself to your notice as a Candidate for the County, totally unshackled by prejudice or otherwise, and a strenuous advocate for Reform.

"Relying upon the strength of the cause I shall advocate, I throw myself upon your favour, and shall assuredly take the sense of the County. I shall look to the vote of every Independent Freeholder, without making further professions.

"Your faithful friend and servant, John Mytton.

"Peculiar private business may prevent my personal attendance, but I look upon it as a favourable omen—knowing that when absent you are most remembered."

This pathetic farrago did nothing to further the cause of Reform, nor of its candidate. It is possible that Beardsworth may have planted in John's half-crazed mind the idea to stand for Parliament, certainly he of all people would have known the nature of the "peculiar private business" when John lay filthy, unshaven and drenched in brandy, with no more sense in him than a log of wood.

The pair of them arrived in Shrewsbury five days before the commencement of the poll and were greeted by a lampoon from the *Chronicle*.

“Arrived last week in this Town, an old broken down racer from the ‘Union Repository’, Birmingham, with two Black Legs, fresh fired and blistered. He is attended by an old Groom, grown grey in the service, who has jockied him, Unbridled, through many unlucky courses, and who, having lately considerably Lightened his Weight, flatters himself he will Reform his style of running. The old Horse starts for the County Stakes this week; to be run for the Quarry Course. The odds are 500 to 1 against him; nevertheless the Brums are in high spirits, he being backed by a few respectable branches of the Mob-ility here. Gentlemen are recommended not to go too near the Horse, he being vicious and apt to kick. It is understood that should he not win the Proprietor will take the Horse back with him to Birmingham, thinking to work him in a Slow Coach and Black Jobs until he is fit for the nacker.”

John’s first public speech did little to persuade the voters to place their confidence in him. If he was sent to Parliament he vowed to support all measures of public economy, although that was a word “which perhaps it does not become me to make much use of—but at least, though I have suffered personally, for want of that quality the public have never suffered through me”.

During the campaign he kept reasonably sober, and it was quite in character for him to nail his Party colours to the hustings and declare dramatically that, “This is my pledge, and to the last hour will I contest the field with my antagonists.”

But the promises of bought votes remained unfulfilled, and although Greville remarked that the Anti-Reformers were dead-beat everywhere it says a good deal for the sense of the Salopians that they rejected John’s affirmation of service and chose instead Sir Rowland Hill, although he was a Tory.

“Friends! Men of Salop! Gentlemen,” the defeated candidate wrote on May 14th. “I pledge myself to come forward at the next Election for this great County, which I have already shaken

to its foundation by my attempts to assert its independence, which shall be maintained with the vigour of a tiger, and the courage of a lion . . . I came forth uncalled for, unprotected by any great interest; I retire from this contest in confidence of victory in future; I adopt one line of conduct, and from that I will not swerve."

He had come bottom of the poll with three hundred and ninety-two votes, and after the election he went back to Birmingham with Beardsworth. He had nowhere else to go. When Caroline left him he was cold-shouldered by the County and forced to accept the bitter knowledge that he was now the least popular man in Shropshire. The riff-raff who battened on to him were driving him rapidly towards bankruptcy, and among all these toss-pot hangers-on there was not one he could call his friend. The hardest to bear of all the heaped indignities of that time was the knowledge that he was despised by the lesser folk who had once loved him, and that he had dissipated the goodwill he possessed among the honest country people. Now that his brief incursion into public life was over he cared no more for politics, and scarcely realised that the Bill with which he had associated himself was passed in July, 1831. It provided for the enfranchisement of the large towns at the expense of fifty-six rotten and pocket boroughs, which had returned between them one hundred and eleven members. Voting qualifications were altered to bring in those householders who owned property worth more than ten pounds a year, although this was unsatisfactory to the poorer people. In spite of these incredibly moderate demands the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, and it was not until nearly a year later that measures could be taken to force it through.

Sometime during this period John and Beardsworth parted, the elder man having become thoroughly tired of his drunken companion whose financial state was so precarious that the duns were openly waiting for him on the doorstep. If John had begun borrowing money it is possible that Beardsworth took steps to get rid of him for it seems unlikely that John would willingly leave the one man who had befriended him.

He drifted down to London and took rooms at Pulteney's Hotel, the resort of fashionable sporting men and young bachelors of means, which he had known well in the good days when he came to town to gamble, to buy clothes and horses and to hunt with the nearby packs. Those who remembered him then must have been shocked at his appearance now, dishevelled, furtive, always looking about him for the pursuing bailiffs. The summer was very hot, and as he was afraid to go out in case he was arrested he sat stifling in the low, close rooms. Finally he could stand it no longer, and moved out of London to a small hotel in Richmond, where the air was cooler and he could watch the river and the passers-by.

He was almost caught here, but escaped just in time and took coach for the north, eventually arriving in Merionethshire. The villagers of Dinas Mowddy were astonished to see their Squire walking quickly down the street, "bare-headed, without coat, waistcoat or boots—with nothing on but shirt, trousers and silk stockings".

He did not speak to anyone, but continued to march briskly in the direction of Dolgelly. They never saw him again, and sometime later the rumour went round that he was trying to get away from some danger which threatened him. Presumably he imagined in his confused state that he could hide here in the Welsh hills, and indeed after a while the hunt was called off.

He felt that he must get back to Caroline; perhaps he hoped that she would look after him and comfort him as she had so often done in the past. He vaguely remembered that she was no longer at Halston but had gone back to her family at Chillington. The familiar lanes along which he and Apperley had driven when he was courting seemed unfriendly and full of menace; he drank at the local inn to ease his fears and word went up to the big house that Mad Jack was in the neighbourhood looking for his wife. So instead of the loving arms and gentle words he expected, a party of Walter's servants flung themselves on him before he had time to enter the gates. He fought savagely and floored eight

of them before they overcame him and led him away with bound wrists. He was never to see Caroline again.

The shock of it brought him to his senses. He returned to London, appointed Hodgson and Burnett of Salisbury Street as his solicitors, and placed himself unreservedly in their hands.

Having means of his own, Apperley had been living for more than a year in Calais which was quieter and more select than Boulogne, the other resort for financially embarrassed Englishmen, and he had not seen John for some considerable time. But every now and then stories reached France of his friend's money difficulties, and he was not greatly surprised to read in *The Times* that all the effects at Halston were to be sold to pay his debts.

"My heart bled," he writes, "as I waded through the melancholy details of objects so familiar to my mind, so dear to himself, and also associated with brighter days of my own."

After the sale, when everything except Euphrates the racehorse had been sold, John's petition for bankruptcy had been filed, and Halston was in the hands of the receivers, its owner fled oversea. When Apperley opened the door of his lodgings on Guy Fawkes Day, 1831, he was astonished to see John standing on the doorstep.

"There stood before me a round-shouldered, decrepit, tottering, young-old man, . . . bloated with drink. 'In God's name,' I said, 'what has brought you to France?'

"'Why,' said John, 'three couple of bailiffs were hard at my brush.' "

Apperley offered him a glass of wine, which he drank, then left as suddenly as he had come, saying that he was going by carriage to Guisnes, about eight miles away, where he had been quartered when he was with the Hussars. As he went he clasped Apperley's hand.

"I shall come to you tomorrow, for I have a great deal to say to you."

He arrived the following evening with a fellow sportsman from Warwickshire called Vaughton, and long before they had sat down to dine he was babbling of his new fortune. There

would be seventy thousand pounds to receive, he declared, after all his debts were paid; he was going to start a new racing stable with Macdonald the jockey as rider and trainer, Halston would be completely refurnished, and he had bought a town house in Curzon Street, Mayfair.

Apperley and Vaughton glanced at one another in embarrassment, for there was not a word of truth in anything John said, but neither was willing to contradict him even when he showed them raw marks on his wrists which he declared had been made when he tried to see Caroline.

"I'll have my wife back again, by God! Look at these marks, they handcuffed me, but so help me God, I'll have her yet!"

He began to cry and stamp his feet, to poor Vaughton's discomfiture; he and Apperley presently calmed the wretched man down and saw him back to his lodgings. He was utterly irresponsible, and Apperley took the first opportunity to find out from his valet whether the razors were in a safe place, for there was always the possibility of attempted suicide in his present state of mind.

Apperley was so worried that he wrote privately to John's uncle, Mr Owen of Woodhouse, to whom "I stated my apprehension that his nephew would either go mad, or die, and very shortly too, and wished for his advice on how I should act in case my suspicions should prove well grounded".

Mr Owen was not helpful. He declined to give any advice on the grounds that when it had been offered to John he had not accepted it, and that furthermore it was none of his business.

In his heart Apperley wished John at the bottom of the sea. He was busy with his writing and wanted peace and quiet for it, which he was unlikely to get with John trailing in and out at all hours of the day but he felt unable to desert his old friend when obviously he was incapable of taking care of himself.

Sometimes it was a thankless task. The old Calais hands, past-masters at the art of persuading unsuspecting Englishmen to part with what remained of their money, soon battened on to John, and before long he was giving enormous parties and hand-

ing out banker's drafts in all directions. Apperley's warnings were ignored, and he could have been the victim of a gigantic swindle if he had not met with a bizarre and terrible accident.

One of the rogues who had succeeded in getting money from him suggested a celebration on the town, and sometime after midnight the pair of them, drunk as lords, climbed the stairs to John's bedroom. He undressed, and as he stood swaying in his shirt he began to hiccup.

"Damn this hiccup! But I'll frighten it away?"

And he seized the lighted candle and applied it to the tail of his shirt. Instantly he was a mass of flames.

The other man kept his head, threw John on the ground and tore away the burning material, removing most of the skin as well. Evidently the quantity of brandy he had consumed acted as an anaesthetic, for he got slowly to his feet, raw, smoking, his face a mass of blisters, and looked about him.

"The hiccup is gone, by God!" he said, and collapsed upon the bed.

The next morning Apperley was roused by John's valet, trembling with horror at what he had found when he went into his master's room.

"What doctor have you got?" Apperley asked.

"None, sir."

"Send for Dr Souville immediately, and I will come to your master as soon as I am dressed."

The burnt man was almost beside himself with pain for the effects of the brandy had worn off, and Dr Souville considered he was lucky to be still alive. There was little he could do except to give him a soothing drink and bid him lie quietly; Apperley asked him outright why he had done such a foolish thing and was told, "I wanted to show you how well I could bear pain!"

As the day wore on and his sufferings became worse he insisted on drinking brandy; the raw flesh on his body throbbed and smarted but he never cried out, every now and then he said to Apperley, "Can't I bear pain well!"

They were afraid now for his sanity, and for a while it seemed as though his mind would give way; the very day after his accident he insisted on getting up and attending a small dinner party given by Apperley for some friends, although he fainted twice and had to be carried back to his bed. A fortnight later his mental state had so much deteriorated that the doctor ordered a straitjacket and male nurses standing by ready to apply it.

"Let me try, once more, if I can rouse him to a sense of his situation," said Apperley. He went into the bedroom and stood looking down at the stricken man.

"Mytton," he said, "I am come to tell you that your doctors assure me that you will be a corpse in three days unless you give up drinking brandy."

"So much the better. I wish to die."

"You may yet see happy days if you will give up drinking brandy. Will you promise me to give it up?"

"No, I will not."

Quietly, Apperley told him about the straitjacket, and for the first time in weeks his eyes showed a gleam of emotion. The thought of being put under restraint terrified him and he swore he would only drink what the doctors ordered for him. The straitjacket and its attendants were sent away, and the knowledge that this had been done seemed to improve John's mental state for he submitted without question to the regime prescribed for him.

But Dr Souville was not satisfied, for though his mind healed his body did not, and the doctor feared that some infection like typhus might set in which would be fatal.

Apperley, too, was afraid that John was dying, and felt it his duty to tell him that as his life was in danger he ought to see the priest of the English church in Calais, "a liberal-minded worthy man without an atom of humbug about him".

John clasped Apperley's hand and began to weep.

"I have never intentionally injured anyone in my life, and I hope God will forgive me."

He refused to see the clergyman, although he was terrified of

dying in a foreign land, far away from all he loved, and he asked Apperley to write down a verse:

Condemned in youth to meet the grave
I hope to be received above;
Render my soul to Him who gave,
My latest breath to you, my love.

“And when I die, I trust to your sending it to my wife,” he said but the time did not come so soon.

He lingered through the winter in great pain and danger, while his life hung in the balance; Mr Henry Wyatt, a Warwickshire squire who came to see him said, “No other man but Mytton would have survived.”



CHAPTER FIFTEEN



HIS great strength and iron constitution saw him through to recovery, but three male nurses were on duty day and night for he became violent as the pain left him, and had to be held down in his bed. During his calm moments he wrote innumerable notes to his agent, to Apperley or to anyone else he could think of, reasonable and coherent, or wild and rambling according to his mental state. Friends who took turns in sitting up with him at nights were subjected to a barrage of questions or meaningless phrases, and the suicidal tendencies were still there.

One day a servant from the hotel arrived breathless to say that Mr Mytton had somehow got possession of half a dozen knives, and was alone in his room with them. Apperley went over at once, taking with him Vaughton, who was a powerfully built man. John was lying on the bed, the blades clasped in his hands; the two others quietly stood beside him.

“Heyday, Squire!! What are you going to do with all those knives?” Apperley said.

“Come and lay by me and I’ll show you!” John peered up

cunningly, but Apperley remained where he was. "I've made your fortune and old Vaughton's too—a hundred and fifty thousand pounds apiece for each of you—for I have found out that these knives will extract fire from flesh."

Vaughton was more quick-witted than he looked. "How much better they would do that if they were warmed at the fire," he said, and held out his hand for them.

"To be sure!" John replied, relinquishing them trustingly.

It was later discovered that the valet had given the weapons to his master; perhaps he had got tired of attending him and thought it would be a good way out of service. He certainly had his wish for Apperley dismissed him, and since good servants were scarce in Calais John's suite now consisted of ex-sailors. They were not reliable guardians because John could always persuade them to get him a bottle of spirits; often they came back with Eau de Cologne which John swore he only used as perfume or as a friction rub against bed-sores, but there were so many bottles in his bedroom that obviously he was drinking it.

Old Mrs Mytton had come over to Calais and was attending her son, but there was little she could do to help him while he was still addicted to alcohol and she decided to send Apperley over to London to consult with Dr Sutherland, who was experienced in such cases. Under his direction two responsible trained persons arrived to take charge of the patient and the ex-seamen were sent packing; the new regime advocated good food, pure country air and a lodging more spacious than that which he now occupied. It seemed sensible to try and rent a château, but owners were chary of accepting a gentleman under restraint and in the end Apperley did the negotiating in his own name.

When suitable premises had been found he invited John to join him, and in the spring of 1832 the pair moved into a delightful small château. Apperley undertook to look after his friend without the help of the trained assistants, and for a little while everything went smoothly; John was a model patient, grateful for Apperley's interest and trying to do as he was told.

Mrs Mytton went home, but left instructions for the keepers to remain in Calais for the time being, and it was just as well that she did so.

John's resolve broke down and in spite of Apperley's care and watchfulness he escaped to Calais and began to drink himself unconscious. His unfortunate host went after him and tried to persuade him to return, but John was so violent that the keepers had to be sent for and Apperley was placed at considerable inconvenience to rearrange the living quarters at the château.

John had to be carried into the vehicle that brought him from Calais for he had lost the use of his legs, but gradually he began to improve under the strict routine of his attendants. Presently he was able to walk several miles a day without feeling tired, and could enjoy his food without having to smother it with Cayenne pepper. Dr Sutherland's sensible instructions included a small amount of alcohol, and John settled down into a placid regular existence so unlike his former life that Apperley remarked, "He to whom the whole world had appeared insufficient to afford pleasure, and who had spent hundreds and thousands of pounds in pursuit of it, was now completely happy in the occupation of picking up sea-shells in the morning and washing them in vinegar in the evening . . . All this, with the perusal of the *Morning Herald*, the *Age*, and the Calais Journals, formed the business of the day."

The sea-shells were afterwards carefully arranged in drawers which no one else was allowed to touch, and his complete absorption in this futile pastime indicated the extent of his mental deterioration, but the doctors agreed he could recover completely in mind and body if he kept strictly to the rules which they had laid down for him. They could not predict what would happen afterwards, but they hoped that if he was allowed sufficient time to lead a well-regulated life under supervision it might become second nature to him.

About two months after he had been rescued from the Calais wineshops a letter arrived from Mrs Mytton. She seemed convinced that her son was now well enough to return to England

where some documents connected with the sale of his property needed his signature, and she insisted that he be sent home as soon as possible.

Under the circumstances Apperley had to obey her instructions, although he knew that John was in no fit state to undertake a long journey. He still needed to be firmly handled and kept to a strict ration of alcohol, and it was absurd to go back to England where the bailiffs were waiting for him. With great misgiving Apperley took his friend down to Calais and saw him on to the packet; they parted, each wondering when he would see the other again. John promised to behave himself but as soon as the vessel was clear of the harbour he was down below with a bottle of brandy, almost choking himself with the neat spirit.

The London to which he returned in June, 1832, had celebrated the passing of the Reform Bill by smashing the windows of the Tory peers, and insulting Queen Adelaide as she returned home from Hanover Square. Upon the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo a gang of hooligans tried to drag the Duke of Wellington from his horse as he rode down Fenchurch Street, and the police were called out to escort him home. It was certainly no place for a man like John, and after he had put his name to the documents which deprived him of all his estates save the two which were entailed upon his eldest son, he wrote to his agent requesting that the Halston rents be remitted to him, and quietly slipped away to the Channel Islands, where the bailiffs could not reach him.

In this he acted quite rationally and sensibly, and it is difficult to imagine why he decided to return to Halston a month later, when every dun in the county was after him. Perhaps it was because he had heard there was to be a county election in Shropshire, which triggered off a reaction in his unstable mind. If he could be returned to Parliament all his troubles would be over and his money problems solved, so he turned up at Halston to the distress of his agent, who told him that Sir Rowland Hill and two other gentlemen had been successfully canvassing for some weeks, and that to return to his home was utter folly.

It did not much matter now what he did. Halston represented a kind of refuge, although it stood empty and deserted, and stripped of all the good old homely things which had been in their places before he was born. He stumbled, sobbing, across the stable yard where the faint reek of horses reminded him of those splendid days when he had ridden the countryside like a king, flaunting his scarlet coat to the shrill note of the hunting horn. He leaned up against a half open door. Beyond it was the stall where Baronet had stood, and John's tears mingled with the dust and wisps of hay at his feet.

He found a hiding place in one of the upper rooms, and there, attended by one servant, he remained for several months, staring out of the window over the great trees in the park, drinking himself unconscious and, between bouts, full of bitterness and remorse. Once or twice he made as if to take the road south to Chillington, to Caroline and the children, then turned back in despair. He knew they would never let him see her, and he waited for his inevitable arrest with fatalistic composure.

It came in November, for two debts owed to Birmingham bankers, and John was imprisoned in Shrewsbury Gaol. Bail was not allowed, but he was well treated for the Governor of the prison was in his debt. Nine years before, in those far off glorious days when he was High Sheriff, he had been responsible for the man's appointment.

Several of his friends offered to lend him money, but in all cases there were strings attached and he refused; at the end of the month he was committed to the King's Bench Prison in London. Apperley saw him there and was horrified at his appearance.

"He was still the same bloated unhealthy looking son of Bacchus, and he had a leg in a state nearly approaching mortification."

Yet it was barely two years since he had galloped Baronet across the green fields of Shropshire, in full possession of his strength and youth. The ulcerated leg gave him a lot of trouble, and might have been more serious if one of his fellow-prisoners

had not undertaken to see that he kept off the brandy, and perhaps if he had been obliged to stay there for several months away from drink he might have been able to continue the improvement begun in France. Debtor's prisons were not uncomfortable places for those who could afford to pay for privileged treatment, but by the end of December all John's creditors had been paid, probably from the sale of Halston timber. So he was released into the London streets without restraint or supervision, dangerous as a tiger and mad as a March hare. He dropped out of sight for a while for there were many queer corners in the capital where a man could lose himself if he had no home and no purpose, but presently John began to feel the need for female companionship. As he was crossing Westminster Bridge one evening he met a street woman and accosted her.

“How do you do!”

“Very well, I thank you, sir. How do you do?”

“Where are you going?”

“I don't know!”

“Then come and live with me and I'll settle £500 a year on you!”

Her name, she told him, was Susan. She was twenty years old and her relations were all respectable people who had disowned her. These two lonely, abandoned people went off hand in hand to find a night's lodging; they came to a hotel kept by a Frenchman and here, for a while, Susan looked after her lover with a wife's tenderness and they found some sort of happiness together. But he hated being short of money and tried to augment their slender stock by gambling. Of course he lost heavily, and soon the duns were after him again.

He and Susan slipped away one night without paying their hotel bill and made for the coast. Within a few hours they were back in Calais, knocking upon poor Apperley's door; the best he could do for them was to see them settled at the Crown Hotel for the night, but on the following day John was back in prison again.

The French authorities had been waiting to apprehend him

over a complicated affair of notes of hand left behind after his previous visit, but since the sum involved was only fifty pounds the matter was soon settled and he and Susan went back to their spendthrift existence. Apperley watched anxiously as the pair ran up an immense bill, and he was not at all surprised when John came to him and announced that as he could not pay it he was off to England again. He actually got as far as Boulogne when the landlord of the Crown caught up with him, brandishing his unpaid account, and John was lodged in the local gaol. Fortunately his agent had at that moment arrived with some money from Halston and since Apperley had already given assurances that the bill would be paid, John was released.

He had grown tired of the coast of France, which was hardly to be wondered at, so he and Susan decided to pack up their belongings and go off to Lille. No one could have been more relieved at their departure than Apperley, who hoped for peace and quiet to continue his interrupted work. In Calais he had found the ideal spot for this purpose; there were few distractions and each time he visited England he felt less inclined to go back and settle there permanently. His acute snob-sense warned him that nowadays money counted far more than breeding in society, and that doors were being opened which had formerly remained firmly closed, and he was aware of the rumours surrounding the Royal Family.

Adverse public opinion directed against the Throne was a source of real unhappiness to the Queen, and it was beginning to affect her health. She was worried about her husband, who had never been very bright and now seemed more vague and stupid than ever, but the gossips' declaration that he was a benighted old simpleton and his wife a nasty German *Frau* was neither kind nor justified.

The King and Queen were childless and likely to remain so. The Queen's last miscarriage had been a serious one, and Princess Victoria was now almost certain to succeed.

"She is a little Whig!" said the squires gloomily, but the child was young and much could happen in a few years so they

shrugged their shoulders and turned to more congenial topics, horses, and hounds, and the prospects for the Derby. It was won that year, 1833, by Dangerous, a 30-1 outsider, and the same jockey, Chapple, also rode another longshot, Vespa, to win the Oaks. Apperley kept abreast of the racing news, and sometimes he thought of all those horses who had once been in training for John, each with its racing plates tacked up on the stable door with the name painted within and the amount of money it had won, but the stables had been empty and deserted since 1830 and its past triumphs only faded memories. But John had brought all his troubles on himself and Apperley was more than thankful that since his departure from Calais he had not troubled to write.

It was like a recurring nightmare, then, to look from his window on that August morning and see John himself staggering up the drive, without shirt or waistcoat and covered with blood. There was nothing for it but to take him in, attend to him as well as possible and try to extract some sense from his long rambling tale of misfortune. It appeared that he and Susan had set out from Lille in the public diligence to travel to Calais, but at St Omer they had quarrelled and he refused to go on any further with her, so she promptly left him and went off. By evening John was very drunk indeed and got into a fight in the back streets of St Omer where he was soundly thrashed, being in no fit condition to defend himself. Most of his money had spilled out of his pocket, and with only three sous to his name he set out to walk to Calais, a distance of nearly twenty-seven miles.

Halfway there he pawned some of his clothes to get a meal and two glasses of gin and water from an old woman at a wayside inn; his feet were sore and he felt sick and Apperley could hardly maintain patience with him. Nevertheless this good friend fitted him out with clothes and gave him food and money so that he was able to complete his journey into Calais, find Susan and make it up with her.

Their idyll was not to last long. The hotel bill he had neglected

to pay in London now turned up, and as it was for the considerable sum of £200 John was back in Calais gaol again. Here he remained for fourteen days, visited by the long-suffering Apperley, while his mother was sent for to bring over the money needed for the debt.

When she arrived, four days later, he was released and remained sulkily in Calais, drinking hard in spite of Mrs Mytton's efforts to restrain him. Susan had had enough and left him for good which added to his misery, and such wits as he did possess were muddled with brandy. He went round the town insulting every Frenchman he met and brawling drunkenly in the streets, and after a few weeks of this Mrs Mytton decided that she would have to take him back to England. It would be pleasant to know that they had thanked Apperley fittingly for the endless patience he had shown, and for all the trouble he had taken, but he does not mention it and perhaps he did not think it worth recording.

And so they parted, this time for good. Apperley stayed in France, returning to London in 1843 where he died. During the ten years of life left to him he wrote many articles and several books, including *The Life of John Mytton* which is a scrappy and not specially noteworthy biography of his old friend. It seems to have been written in a hurry, and indeed it was published barely a year after John's death so possibly Apperley was trying to cash in on his notoriety.

His only work of fiction, *The Life of a Sportsman* is very little better, and would be almost unreadable were it not for the fascinating details it contains of sporting pursuits of all kinds. He was unable to keep his vanity out of his style of writing, even the "Nimrod" hunting articles are full of it, and this led Robert Smith Surtees, the creator of Jorrocks, to nickname him Pomponius Ego and assure him immortality by placing this character in the pages of *Handley Cross*.

But Apperley himself was charming and everyone liked him, and certainly his days with *The Sporting Magazine* had been an unqualified triumph due almost entirely to his personality. He

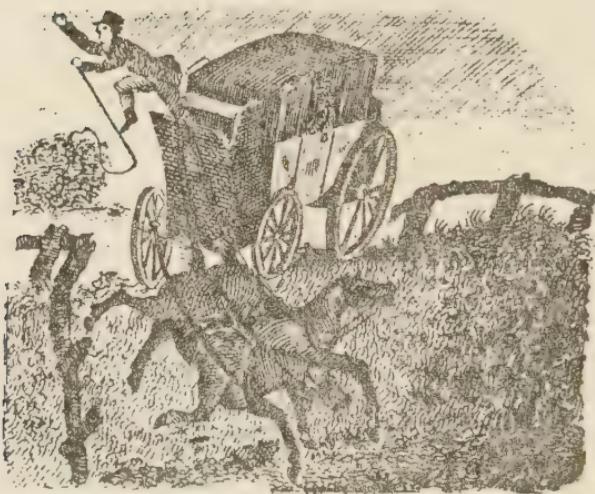
was able to hold his own with the hardbitten Midland squires who led their foxhound packs over some of the most exclusive country in England; he was accepted by them as an equal and invited to stay in their houses; he was all things to all men, and the best of friends to Mad Jack Mytton.

The Abode of Genius -



*"My Lodging is on the cold ground,
And very hard is my fare; "* —

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



JOHN and his mother returned to Halston in October, soon after his thirty-seventh birthday, and during the long journey from London to Shrewsbury he seemed content to sit staring out of the coach window. Perhaps the familiar countryside brought back memories of the folly and grandeur of former days, of the risks he had taken, the crazy tricks he had played on his friends, and the runs with the Albrighton when no fence was too big for him. Sir Bellingham Graham had been astonished when he rode Baronet over the park railings of Atcham, although he had one arm in a sling, and the river Severn had not stopped him when hounds swam over after their fox and the rest of the field had been left standing on the opposite bank.

The motion of the vehicle made him drowsy, and in his confused half dream he and a friend were once more galloping their hunters bareback across the country, dressed only in shirts, dressing gowns and slippers, all this inextricably mixed with the

cry of the pack, the drumming of thousands of hooves on the Shavington Day, the "Tally Ho" and the wildly waving huntsman as he saw the fox break cover. The coach wheels lurched and rattled on the flints and he instinctively braced himself, remembering the dreadful night when he had been awakened by the shock of his carriage and four being driven full tilt into a fallen tree. In the darkness the postboys had mistaken the road and galloped downhill to destruction; the carriage had been smashed to pieces, John injured, and his valet, who had been pitched out on to the road, sustained a fractured skull.

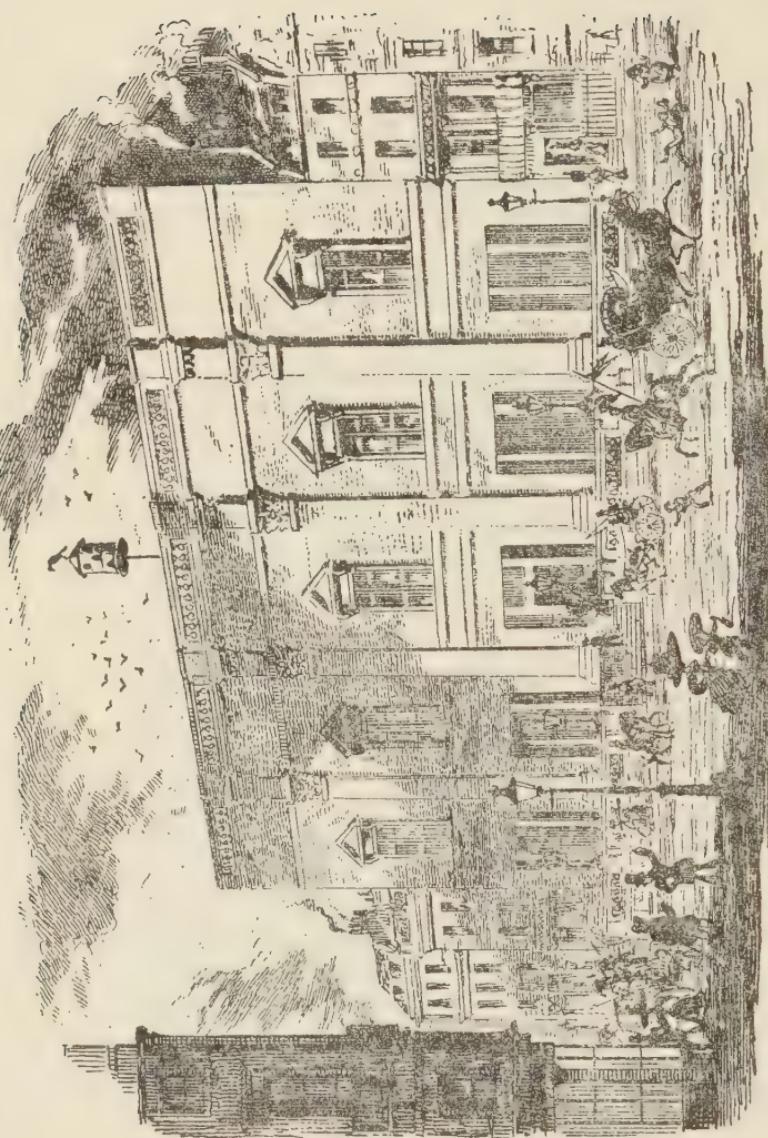
There were no hunters or carriages for him at Halston, and the melancholy silence of the place got on his nerves. Where there had once been the bustle of servants and all the activities of a great estate there was nothing but emptiness, not even a dog to welcome him. He stayed for a little while to please his mother, walking in the pale sunshine and gazing out over the land of which he was no longer master. A few old acquaintances of the family came to call, more out of curiosity than friendship, and they could hardly recognise the gaunt travesty of the man who had once been gay Jack Mytton.

At Halston his mother was able to control his drinking but when she was called away to London he slipped back into his old ways, secured enough money to purchase himself a seat on the stage to the capital, and plunged recklessly into a drunken abandoned existence, living on borrowed cash and I.O.U.'s. His gambling debts piled up, and he began to dodge from place to place to escape his creditors; he tasted the dregs of life and his craving for brandy led him to associate with anyone who would stand him the price of a drink, and London's underworld contained many desperate characters. Yet in all this squalor he still remembered that he was a gentleman born, and it never entered his head to take to crime although each time he emerged from a debauch he was less responsible for his actions.

Sometimes he thought about Caroline and the children; it was Christmas time now and they were celebrating at someone else's board. Suddenly he ached to see them but his youngest son would

Johany Cockaigne showing Cousin Yemmas a Lions den ~

"That's one of the London 'Hells' ^{as they call it} ! ~
"No sure ! why what a nice looking place !! ~
"Well, no wonder so many people do go to the !! ~
"Devil if he's a gaffer such fierce houses !! ~



be six years old now and Harriet Emma nearly fifteen. He would not recognise them now, nor they him.

He made no resistance when he was arrested on January 21st 1834, for debts of £2,000, and seemed almost to welcome the familiar environs of the King's Bench Prison, but the ulcerated leg broke out afresh and John continued to drink heavily in an effort to alleviate the pain. The same prisoner who had ministered to him during his first detention again came to his aid, trying to ease him as best he could. Apperley received the news in France and wrote, "So soon as I was informed that Mr Mytton was once more within the walls of the King's Bench Prison, I felt assured that he would never quit them but on his bier, neither did he."

Three weeks later he had a stroke which paralysed his legs and the doctors declared that there was little chance of recovery. Mrs Mytton came to live at the prison and sat by her son's bedside trying to tempt him to eat, but he would not take food and his mind began to wander. He spoke of Caroline and the children and asked for them to be brought to him; when they did not come he fell silent but seemed comforted by the reading of prayers and his fellow prisoners took turns to sit with him and keep him company.

On March 29th he was struggling in delirium. His mother held him in her arms and the prison chaplain came to pray with him; gradually the stricken man relaxed and lay quietly throughout the rest of the day. In the evening he sat up suddenly as the haemorrhage erupted into his brain, and he was dead before Mrs Mytton laid him back on the pillow.

The Times carried an obituary which Apperley read later on in Calais; "His princely magnificence and eccentric gaieties obtained him great notoriety in the sporting and gay circles, both in England and on the Continent. His failings, which leaned to virtue's side, greatly reduced him, and he has left numerous friends to lament the melancholy fact of his dying in a prison, which if contrasted with his former splendour, furnishes a striking example of the mutability of mundane affairs."

John was dead, and his world was dying. The great pendulum of reaction which had swung against the Puritans and the religious quarrels of the seventeenth century had now returned in the opposite direction after a hundred and fifty years, and Victorian moral standards were to replace those lusty, bawdy influences which had bred John Mytton and others like him. They were not to return until after the first world war when the whole ethic of morality had undergone a basic change, and though it is possible that John could have survived, an anachronism and a misfit, in our age it is rather more doubtful whether we could have survived in his. He left nothing behind him and the England he knew and loved has long since gone, but perhaps on some crisp November morning when the horn rings clear over the stubble it may be possible to catch a fleeting glimpse of a brave man on the Hit-or-Miss mare, flying his fences for the honour of Shropshire.

After the celebrated phrenologist M. Delville had fashioned the death mask, John's body was removed from the prison and taken to the hotel where his mother was staying. From there by slow stages it was conveyed to Shrewsbury, where the *Chronicle* reported, "We last week announced the death of this gentleman. His body was conveyed from London, where he expired, to this town with all solemnity. On passing through the town, many of the shops were closed; and crowds assembled to take a last look on his bier, and pay the homage of a sigh to the memory of John Mytton. We rejoice to say that, before his death, the consolations of religion had been eagerly resorted to, and afforded him both comfort under affliction, and hope in the prospect of eternity."

The funeral cortège was splendid and escorted by a detachment of the North Shropshire Cavalry, complete with trumpeters and standard. There were a score of mourning carriages and over a hundred people on horseback bringing up the rear of the procession. Nearly three thousand people followed it to Oswestry on foot, and the whole route was lined with countryfolk who had come to pay their last respects, standing silently with tears running down their faces, for the Squire had come home and all the old follies were forgiven.

Said the *Chronicle*, "A mourning peal was rung at Oswestry, and the bells of Shrewsbury, Ellesmere, Whittington, Halston, etc., tolled during the day. The number of spectators was immense, and the road along which the procession slowly moved was bedewed with the tears of thousands who wished to have a last glance. Everything was conducted with the greatest order; but there was a great rush to enter the chapel on the body being taken out of the hearse. The body was placed in a shelf in the family vault, under the communion table of Halston Chapel, surrounded by the coffins of twelve of his relatives."

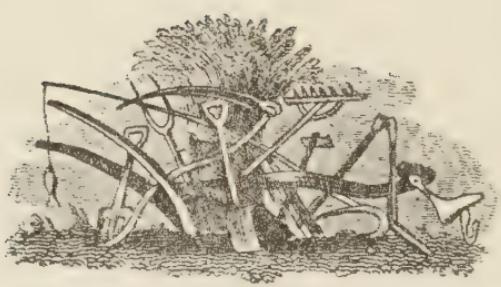
It lay not far from Harriet Emma, and the coffin bore a plate inscribed simply, "John Mytton Esq., of Halston. Born 30th of September, 1796. Died March the 29th, 1834."

For what else could one say of such a man, and of such a life?

More than a century later, the marvellous words of Dame Edith Sitwell crystallised into a single paragraph all that he was, and had been.

"I hope that this pitiful creature has found a warm country heaven of horses and hounds, an old and kindly heaven of country habits and country sweetness, with heavenly mansions where he and Baronet can sit by the fire together, horse and man, and where the master can forget the dirt and wretchedness of the debtor's prison, and the eight bottles of port a day, and all the ancient foolishness."





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